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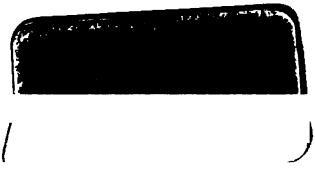

HER FATHER'S NAME.

HER FATHER'S NAME.

A Novel.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF "FIGHTING THE AIR," "LOVE'S CONFLICT," ETC.

In Three Volumes.

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HER FATHER'S NAME.

CHAPTER I.

THE LETTER OF INTRODUCTION.

THERE is many a battle fought in the night that leaves no traces for the rising day to mock at. When Leona Lacoste rose from her bed upon the following morning, she knew she had a self-imposed duty of which she must never again lose sight; yet she applied herself to fulfil the routine of her every-day employments as calmly as if she had registered no oath before high Heaven. Solemn and stately she ever was, for the now civilised life which she had been leading for the last twelve

months had had no power to destroy the glorious southern nonchalance which had imbued her being, and those about her could not perceive any difference in the proud bearing and lofty demeanour which made them at all times rather diffident of intruding their confidence upon the beautiful actress. So many a one—or, as may be written with greater truth —so, almost *everyone* walks through this world a sealed book to his neighbour, who looks at him and sighs, and envies his placidity, comparing it favourably with the turmoil that rages in his own breast. Mademoiselle d'Acosta went through the rehearsal of some new part that morning in a manner to call forth the honest praise of Mr. Burrage. She even met the Boston manager's inquiries after her health without (apparently) a tremor, and parried the various conjectures that met her as to the cause of her sudden illness with admirable skill. Nor did she feel much more unhappy

than usual. The decision at which she had arrived was but the culmination of the doubts and difficulties that had beset her since her father's death. There was no more to conceal and grieve at than she had concealed and grieved at since that time. The only difference in her feelings perhaps was that she experienced less cordiality towards her fellow-creatures, and was more ready to suspect and disbelieve them than she had formerly been. Before the day was ended, also, her thoughts received an impetus in another direction. Valera wrote to tell her he was ill. A bilious headache, he affirmed, brought on by over-exertion in the sun, alone affected him, but he must stay at home and nurse it for his employers' sake. Leona had expected to see him that afternoon, and she was disappointed. Somehow, she could seldom interest herself in her ordinary occupations unless Christobal were by her side. It seemed so natural to

see him in her rooms—lounging on the sofa and playing with Pepita, or smoking his cigar in the balcony, whilst she was busied in altering her dresses, or copying out her parts. It reminded her of the old childish days when they had always been together, and the absence of Valera put everything out of joint; particularly as that day she required his company, so she told herself, to help to dissipate the unpleasant recollections that still lingered in her mind. And she wrote a jesting but affectionate little note in Spanish, telling him not to be such a baby as to mind a headache, but to come to her as soon as ever he was able, and let her cure it for him. But her answer did not have the effect she imagined. On the next day there was no communication from her adopted brother. Then Leona grew anxious. Impulsive, and accustomed from infancy to accept the dictates of her own heart as the best test of what she

should do, she felt no hesitation in calling at Valera's apartments, which were situated a short distance from her own. There she found him in a high fever, and heard that the doctor had been sent for, who, when he arrived, pronounced the young man to be on the brink of an illness, and ordered him at once to bed.

Christobal objected strongly. The prospect which had just opened before him was present to his mind; he felt that he *must* not be ill, consequently he refused to believe that he could be. The medical man was having a hot time of it when Leona came to the rescue.

"What is this childish nonsense, Tobal?" she said, imperiously. "If you are advised to go to bed, to bed you must go."

"But, Leona, consider the consequences of my being ill. It was but yesterday Mr. Upjohn told me my letters of introduction should be ready within the week."

"And if you refuse to obey the doctor's order you will never be able to deliver them. This may be but a passing indisposition, which you would turn by your obstinacy into a dangerous illness. Come, Tobal, if you will not go to bed of your own accord I will put you there."

The young Spaniard laughed at her threat, and dragged himself languidly into the adjoining room. Leona commenced to question the doctor.

"Is he going to be really ill, monsieur?"

"I fear so; but to-morrow will decide. Meanwhile he must be well watched and attended to."

"I shall wait on him myself. Tell me what to do."

"You are a relation of Don Valera's, mademoiselle?"

"I am his sister, monsieur. I should not think of leaving him whilst he is sick."

"I will send a medicine which he must take regularly, and I think ice to his head will relieve the pain. Meanwhile, should he get light-headed, you had better send for me."

Leona bowed her head in answer. She saw trouble advancing on her from the distance like an armed man.

"One word, monsieur. I have engagements that occupy me all the evenings. Will it be difficult to procure a nurse to look after Don Valera in my absence?"

"I can send one at a moment's notice if required. But let us hope he will not require it. He is perfectly sensible and quiet now. The ice may prevent delirium setting in."

As soon as Valera had ensconced himself in bed, Leona commenced to arrange the order of his apartment. He followed her movements with a grateful eye.

"How good you are to me, *m'amie*. Yes, that is right. Place the water-bottle and the

sherbet near at hand, that I may reach them readily when you have left me."

"I am not going to leave you, Tobal."

"But that is impossible! How can you stay here?"

"How do other people stay here? There are four walls to enclose them, and furniture for them to use. Where is the difficulty?"

"But, Leona, you do not understand. There are no women lodgers in this house. It is inhabited entirely by young men like myself."

"That is all the more reason that I should remain here then. What do men know about nursing?"

"But your reputation may suffer. People are so apt to talk in this world."

"Bah, Tobal!" she answered, with her ready contempt. "When will you learn how little I care for what the world may say? You are ill, and the doctor declares you require good

nursing. That is sufficient. No one nurses you except myself, unless the woman of the house cannot spare time to sit by your bedside whilst I am at the theatre, and then I may have to procure some assistance. But when I am not on the stage I shall be here."

"You are the most generous creature that God ever made," said Valera, drowsily. He felt unable to argue the point further. The symptoms of the fever he had contracted were already beginning to creep over him. His companion did not comment on his words, but she stood by his side and watched the film that drew over his eyes with sickening fear. She had never been called upon before to measure her affection for Valera by the dread of losing him. But she knew the fatal nature of the fevers of that country, and how rapidly they sometimes run their course. She did not like the sunken look which Valera's eyelids had already assumed, nor the extreme drowsiness

which seemed to weigh them down. Had a dozen friends stood in her pathway then and warned her that in resolving to attend on him she would not only risk her character, but lose it, they would have had no effect in making her abandon her post. She was fearless as a lion in a cause of her own adoption, and utterly careless to what others said. So, as soon as she had concluded her performance at the theatre, she settled herself for the night upon the sofa in Valera's sitting-room; greatly, it must be said, to the astonishment and interest of the remaining lodgers in the house, and not a little to the scandal of the landlady. With the morning's sun her worst fears were realised. Christobal was pronounced to be dangerously ill. A professional nurse was engaged to wait on him, whilst Leona was compelled to be absent, and thence followed a week or ten days of anxious suspense, during which the sick man was sometimes worse and some-

times better, but always delirious, and Leona was never quite sure, when she returned from the theatre, whether she might not hear that he was sinking. At the end of that period, however, a decided improvement set in. Valera recovered his consciousness, and, although extremely feeble, began to understand once more what was passing around him, and to take an interest in it. Amongst the first things he asked for were his letters.

"I am not sure if I shall let you have them," replied Leona, playfully.

"Don't keep me waiting," said the invalid. "I am so anxious to know if Upjohn and Halliday have forwarded my letters of introduction, or intend to send another man in my place."

"You need not be afraid of that, Tobal, for Mr. Halliday has sent almost every day to inquire after you, and yesterday the chief

clerk called himself to see how soon you were likely to be about again."

"It is very good of them," murmured Valera. "Still, should my convalescence prove a matter of time, they might find it impossible to keep the berth open for me. Give me that large blue envelope, Leona. It has our office seal upon it. Yes, here it is," he continued, eagerly, as his trembling fingers tore the outside cover to pieces.

"*To Messrs. Evans and Troubridge,*
"320, *High Holborn, London.*
"*Favoured by Don Christobal Valera.*"

"*What!*" screamed Leona, forgetting, in her surprise, the necessity of caution.

Her unusual want of self-control brought the hospital nurse bustling into the room to enjoin quiet, and under cover of the little colloquy that followed, she was in some measure enabled to recover herself.

"Why should you be surprised?" demanded

Valera, languidly. "Do you know anything about them?"

"No, no, no; how should I? Only—tell me—what have they to do with—Halliday and Upjohn?"

"Why, they are about to enter into business negotiations with them, of course, and I am to settle the preliminaries and get the matter into working order. I shall have three months over there at the least, they tell me. I hope the change will set me up again. I am sure I need it," he added, wearily.

"Of course it will. England is a fine bracing place. But read the contents of the letter, Tobal. Or shall I read them to you?"

She was trembling with eagerness to hear if the letter of introduction would throw any light on the subject that so much interested her.

"*You* read it," said Valera. "When I try to fix my eyes on anything, the room seems to go round."

She unfolded the foolscap sheet of paper and read, in rather a shaking voice, as follows :

"Gentlemen, we beg to present to your notice and kind consideration the bearer of these papers, Don Christobal Valera, whom we have deputed to act as our agent in all matters relating to the mercantile negotiations about to be opened between your house and ours. Don Valera is a gentleman whom we have known and employed as our foreign correspondent for the last year, and in whose capacity for business, and strict and honourable dealing we place the utmost confidence. Any attention which you may be enabled to show him during his stay amongst you, will be responded to by a man of birth and breeding, and gratefully acknowledged by ourselves.

"We are, Gentlemen,

"Yours faithfully and obliged,

"UPJOHN & HALLIDAY."

Valera's dull eye gained a momentary lustre as he listened to the words.

"It is complimentary, Leona, is it not? I don't know what I've done to deserve it. And the cashier told me I was certain to be asked to stay at Mr. Evans' house, during my visit to England."

"And why not to the other one's—to Mr. Troubridge's?" asked the girl, with tightly compressed lips.

"Oh! because there is no Troubridge. He's been dead for years. But Mr. Evans—Henry Evans I believe his name is—is a regular millionaire, and keeps open house in London for all strangers connected with the business. Rawlins, the cashier, says I shall find him a very good sort of fellow. He met him once when he was over in New York."

"And shall you stay in his house—his very house?" demanded Leona.

"They tell me so. I believe it is situate

in Hyde Park, which is one of the grandest parts of London. Oh, *m'amie*, how I wish you were going with me!"

"What use would there be in my going?" said the girl shortly. But she was thinking all the while how she could possibly invent some plausible excuse for accompanying him. *In the house—the very house!*

The idea made her blood turn with excitement even whilst she shuddered with an awful fear.

"Leona, you look pale. This nursing has been too much for you," remarked Valera, affectionately.

"Not so, *mon frère*. Never did a patient give less trouble than you have done. But you must gain more strength before you set foot on board the English steamer."

"I am much better to-night. I am quite ready to go. The sight of that letter has put fresh life in me, Leona. Fancy being three

whole months in England, seeing everything of which we have so often read and wondered at together. And there is even a chance, *m'amie*, that if the business on which I go is satisfactorily concluded within the time, my employers may give me a few weeks' holiday to visit Spain. Oh Spain! my beloved country!" the young man went on excitedly. Land of sunshine, and love, and pleasure! How my heart beats at the mere idea of seeing thee again, although I was but an infant in arms when I left thy beautiful shores."

"Tobalito, you must not excite yourself like this. You are not strong enough to think such thoughts. Leave your beautiful Spain to herself for a few days longer."

"How can I leave her to herself, Leona. You are not a Spaniard, or you would not ask such an impossibility. You do not know what we feel for our country, even though we may never have had the happiness of being on her

shores; of how our hearts are wrapped up in her future, and bleed at the recital of her woes. Oh that I could shed the last drop of blood in my body to see Spain what she ought to be—gem of all the nations and queen of the sunny south!"

"You will live to see it, never fear! If your country has right on her side, my brother, she will conquer at last. But just at this moment your destiny takes you in another direction. In talking of Spain you have forgotten England!"

"*Pesta!* Why recall me from that heavenly dream of music and sunshine, to contemplate the cold, foggy aspect of the north. How can anyone live in England who has once heard of Spain?"

"Yet England may prove your passage to her. Think of that, Tobal."

Already he appeared too weary to think any more. The pitch of excitement to which

he had worked himself told terribly on his enfeebled condition, and he lay back on his pillows exhausted—almost sinking. Leona applied all the stimulants he was capable of taking, but without success. His heightened pulse would not subside again, and when the doctor visited his patient that evening, he pronounced the progress of the last two days to have been worse than useless.

"Here we have a relapse, I fear, mademoiselle," he said, as he felt the feverish hand and watched the agitated demeanour of the sick man; "and a relapse in these cases, I need not tell you, is much more dangerous than the original complaint. Can you tell me the cause of it?"

"Don Valera insisted upon having his letters to read, and excited himself greatly over the perusal of some of them."

"Exactly, and has let himself in for another fortnight or three weeks, perhaps, of

fever. It is very annoying. I should have had him on his feet in a couple of days otherwise. I forbid letters being mentioned to him again."

There was no need of the doctor making this order, for before the night was over Valera was again totally unconscious of everything that surrounded him. All the weary routine of watching and waiting and sitting up had to be recommenced, but his lion-hearted friend took up the burden without a murmur, and appeared never to think of her own trouble, nor the danger she ran of succumbing beneath the weight of her multifarious duties. The day came, however, only too soon, when the doctor told her with a lengthened face that the symptoms of Valera's disease had assumed an infectious character, and that she must either give up nursing him, or going to and from the theatre.

"And my advice to you, mademoiselle, is

to resign the care of your brother to the hospital nurse, who will do all that is necessary for him. There are putrid symptoms about his throat that may at any moment endanger your own life, and since your presence here cannot actually afford him any assistance——"

"You advise me to leave him to die alone," said Leona, sharply. "Thank you, monsieur, but that is not *my* idea of a friend."

"But, mademoiselle, your profession then must suffer."

"Let it suffer!"

"Your means of a livelihood—you will not, I trust, think me impertinent for alluding to such a thing—be cut off."

"Let them be cut off!"

"Of course, if mademoiselle has other resources."

"I have no other resources, monsieur."

"Then there is your health to be con-

sidered. Pardon me for saying you are too young, too beautiful, that your welfare is of too much consequence——"

"Monsieur, do you think I am a woman or do you think I am a brute?"

"I consider mademoiselle to be all that is most attractive, most amiable, most——"

She interrupted him curtly.

"I don't believe it. But if you credit me with all these virtues, add to them, at least, one grain of womanly feeling. You tell me that Don Valera—that my brother is—is—is——"

She could not go on, but stood before him fiercely biting her under lip, and tapping her foot upon the ground.

The doctor saw her repressed emotion, and tried to help her.

"That Don Valera is in considerable danger is true, mademoiselle."

"And you want me to leave him, sir?"

she went on, rapidly gaining strength from excitement. "To leave him to die like a dog, a pig, a mule, in this strange place alone, whilst I fly from infection like a coward, and for the sake of a few dollars! Monsieur, you do not know the blood of which I am made. What! *Go* when my friend most needs me! Let a hired nurse receive his last looks, last wishes, last sighs? *Leave him!* and when his friends are so far away too? Oh, monsieur! you are not a man. You must be a devil to think of such a thing."

She did not weep as an ordinary woman would have done, but she turned as white as death, and raised her eyes to heaven, and shook so violently that she was forced to steady herself by a chair.

"Forgive me, mademoiselle," was all the doctor could find to say.

"You have mistaken me, monsieur," she answered, proudly.

"I see I have. I did not expect to find so much courage, and generosity, and unselfishness in New York. I will not urge you again to act against the dictates of your nature. Will you let me ask you, though, where Don Valera's friends may be?"

"They live a long way from here, monsieur. In Rio Janeiro, whence we came."

"So far as that? Still they should be told of his danger."

"I will write to his mother at once."

"And summon her, if possible, to New York. It is useless disguising the truth from you, mademoiselle, and you have a courage equal to the occasion. If Don Valera survives this second attack, which I consider doubtful, he will require months of careful nursing to reinstate his health. And for that purpose he will have to leave New York, and go into the country or to the seaside."

She bowed her head in token of her com-

prehension. She could not trust herself to speak—not even to think, excepting one thing —that this stranger must not be allowed to witness her emotion.

"I will do all that is necessary," she managed to say at last, and then the doctor had the mercy to leave her to fight out the battle with herself in secret.

The next day saw the walls of the city placarded with announcements to the effect that, in consequence of "the sudden and alarming indisposition of Mdlle. Elena d'Acosta"—("sudden and alarming indisposition" may mean a marriage, a quarrel, a freak, anything, in fact, in theatrical parlance)—"the *rôle* of the Chevalier de Poigny, in the highly successful new drama 'English and French' would be sustained by Miss Somebodyelse." The next day also saw a letter on its way down to that insignificant little town outlying Rio de Janeiro, enclosing a sum of money,

and entreating Donna Josefa to use it in travelling to the assistance of her son. And the next day, too, saw what was the saddest sight of all—a young man in the onset of existence fighting with a terrible disease that threatened to lay him low, and a devoted and heroic woman risking her life, and relinquishing her only means of support, in order that she might attend upon his necessities, and lighten the lonely path which she fully believed was leading him to the grave.

What Leona's feelings would have been had Valera died at this juncture, it is impossible to say. She could not have analysed them herself, for she was unaware of their depth or their intensity. She only remembered that Christobal had been her brother and her companion from infancy, and that it would have been as impossible for her to desert him at this crisis as to desert herself. So, cut off from her acquaintances, her occupa-

tions, and her ambition, she remained in that darkened room day after day, and did not know from hour to hour whether she should not stand alone in the world when the next one struck.

CHAPTER II.

"THREE MONTHS—REMEMBER!"

"IT is a long lane that has no turning," and those who have watched by a lingering sick-bed, and spent weeks in alternate fluctuations of hope and despair, know that the strain upon the feelings becomes at last so great that *any* turning is a relief, even though it may lead down to the valley of the shadow of death.

"Give us certainty," they cry, "any certainty must be preferable to this miserable heart-sickening anxiety and suspense."

And at last the assurance comes—the turning is reached—and, if hope dies with the first view of it, the mourners are ready to retract their former asseverations, and to entreat heaven

for the power to accompany the object of their solicitude unto the end of all things.

The time came for Leona Lacoste to see the end of her self-imposed duty, but it came accompanied by its reward. Valera was pronounced out of danger so far as the fever and the terrible putrid throat were concerned, but the exhaustion and complete debility they left behind them made his final recovery still a matter of conjecture, and never had Leona so welcomed the gossiping tongue and garlic-flamed breath of Donna Josefa, as she did when she saw her enter her son's apartments and take up her station by his bedside. Donna Josefa Valera was like many another mother who has grown-up sons and daughters. She was quarrelsome, argumentative, and generally domineering when Christobal was in good health; induced thereto by a certain jealousy that he had thrown off the submission of childhood, and presumed to think for himself; but

when she saw him weakened and prostrate as a child again, with all a child's desire, too, for being coaxed, and caressed, and waited on, her maternal solicitude was in full activity, and Leona had no further trouble in the matter. Give Donna Josefa her accustomed mess of garlic—and in that cosmopolitan city each stranger may find a *cuisine* suited to his own palate—and she was contented and happy to sit by Valera's side for the remainder of the day, and chatter to him on any subject that interested him most. And the man who had been down to the very gates of death, and who was still too weak to dispute, or object, or wrangle, took things much as they came to him in those first days of convalescence, and did not even appear annoyed that the girl who had nursed him so faithfully throughout his illness, should have resigned her place to another. He did not even seem to remember that she had so nursed him.

And for the girl herself?

Proudly and majestically as she had taken her place in his sick-room, ignoring the right of anyone to question her claims to that position, so proudly and majestically she withdrew, without a murmur at being superseded; without a hint even to the invalid, or his mother, of what she felt at quitting the post in time of peace, which she had occupied bravely and unflinchingly whilst the battle raged, and death might have struck her down, at any moment, with one blow.

Without a murmur, but not without a pang. Leona did not know, perhaps, until all the danger was past, how keenly she had felt the peril in which Valera had been placed.

He was so changed that Donna Josefa herself could hardly recognise him. His wavy silken hair had been shorn close to his head; his delicate features were drawn and pinched; his olive complexion cracked and yellow; his

soft black eyes fierce, staring, and famine-stricken. His temper, too, naturally so gentle, had now become fractious and irritable; even the sight of his best friend appeared at times to worry him. And when, to these natural drawbacks of recovery, was added an apparently complete indifference as to whether his mother or Leona sat by his side and attended to his multifarious wants, it is scarcely to be marvelled at that the girl who had risked so much more than her life in his behalf, should cease to press her attentions on him, and hint that since his mother had arrived, it was as well she should return to her own apartments.

Donna Josefa was not disposed to combat this proposal. She had never been very friendly with Leona Lacoste, and her surprise at discovering her located in the same house as her son—for the fact of Leona being in New York had been kept a complete secret

from her former acquaintances, neither had she disclosed it even when summoning Valera's mother to his assistance—had given rise to more than one unpleasant passage of arms between them.

"I should certainly say it was the most discreet and proper thing that you could do, senora," quoth the old Spanish lady, who was so very particular about the morals of her friends. "It is a pity the necessity for your staying here should ever have arisen, but now that Don Valera's mother has come, there can be no possible excuse for your remaining longer."

"I have no desire or intention of doing so, madame," returned Leona, haughtily; yet she glanced towards Christobal as she spoke, with a hope that he would say something in her defence. But Christobal was lying on his pillows with his eyes wide open, indeed, but his ears fast closed. He was too feeble

to disconnect one sound from another in the sentences he heard uttered around him.

"I presume that you *have* apartments of your own," continued Donna Josefa, with her most unpleasant air, as she took a pinch of snuff from an old-fashioned embossed silver box; "it is scarcely desirable for young people of opposite sexes, who are no relation to one another, to lodge under the same roof. Such a thing would not be tolerated in *my* country."

An angry answer was hovering on Leona's tongue, but she glanced at Valera's helpless condition, and checked the impulse to pronounce it.

"Your country is more particular than others in these matters, Donna Josefa," she said, with well-directed sarcasm; "and perhaps your women require closer watching. But the free life of the Brazils has made *me* independent."

"Too independent, I think, by half," rejoined the old lady.

"And yet, had I thought more of myself than of him, your son would have been badly nursed, madame."

"Well, well, well; let us be thankful that the occasion for it is passed. The doctor will be here this evening to say how soon the poor lad may be moved into the country, and then you will return to your occupation, senora, and I trust will never again have such a call made upon your services."

"The Blessed Virgin forbid!" cried the girl, impulsively.

But when the doctor next saw his patient she found they were to be separated sooner than she had anticipated, for he advised Donna Josefa to take her son away from New York as soon as possible, as the only means by which his convalescence could be established.

This proposal was not so difficult to comply with, as might be imagined, as Messrs. Upjohn and Halliday had generously decided to continue to pay their clerk's salary until he should be fit to resume his work. But the sudden change brought with it a sudden increase of trouble, with which Donna Josefa, by reason of her age and ignorance of any language but her own, was unfit to cope, and Leona, with her usual nobility of disposition, forgetting everything but that Christobal's comfort demanded her assistance, offered to remain and help his mother to prepare for the journey.

She knew better than Donna Josefa where Tobal's apparel lay, and what he would require during his sojourn in the country; and now, when she realised that the hour of parting with her friend had really arrived, her tears dropped hotly amongst the articles she was folding and packing away, though she took

good care that his mother should not be witness to her feelings.

As she was emptying the wardrobe to fill his travelling-chest, she came upon some papers, amongst which she recognised the letter of introduction to the firm of Evans and Troubridge. The sight of it startled her. It seemed to bring back so much to her memory that she had half forgotten in her anxiety for Valera's life. He could not go to England then! That place to which she had at one time almost made up her mind to accompany him! Perhaps he would never go. The post for which he had been intended would be filled by another, before he had regained strength sufficient for the journey, and such an opportunity might never again arise for him—or her. What should she do with the letter? What use was it now to Valera? What possible need could there be for sending it into the country with him? Perhaps it

ought to be returned to the principals of the firm. Leona glanced towards the bed. The dusk was drawing on apace, but she could distinguish that Donna Josefa was nodding in her arm-chair, and that Christobal's eyes were closed. She could not ask him his wishes on the subject. She must wait until the morrow. At that moment the landlady's face was thrust cautiously in at the door.

"Hist! mademoiselle."

"Hush! speak low; he is asleep."

"Some one waits to see you outside."

"Say that I am coming."

She placed the letter in her pocket as she spoke, and quietly left the room. On the landing she encountered Rawlins, the cashier.

"I come from Mr. Halliday, mademoiselle. Can I see Don Valera?"

"Not at present! He is asleep, and has a journey before him to-morrow."

"So we heard, and I was sent up here in

consequence. Mr. Halliday is afraid Don Valera's recovery may be retarded by his disappointment about this English business, and commissioned me to tell him that he has no intention of sending anyone in his place, but shall put off the matter altogether until he is able to take it up."

"It is very considerate of Mr. Halliday. I believe the idea of being prevented going to England has weighed upon Don Valera's mind."

"Well, you must tell him, mademoiselle, that he is to think no more about it. The firm will keep the appointment until he is well enough to fill it, for two or three months, if necessary. I suppose it will take that time to set him up again?"

"I am afraid so. I heard the doctor say to-day that it would require as much as that to regain the strength he has lost in this illness. He is very weak."

"Exactly so. And Mr. Halliday wishes him plainly to understand that there is no hurry about the matter. We have not yet communicated with Messrs. Evans and Troubridge, and so there's no harm done. And he's to take his time about it, mademoiselle. Two or three months, remember. Two or three months—it will make no difference to us."

"And you have not yet communicated with the—the—firm you mentioned in England, sir—the gentleman to whom the letter of introduction was addressed?"

"Not yet—not with regard to Valera's visit, that is to say. There was no need to do so. The letter we sent him would have been sufficient under any circumstances, for they understand all about the business part of the transaction already; but we should have written privately as well. But now we shall put it off till we see Don Valera in New York again. Remember me to him, mademoiselle, and tell

him to make a good recovery and cheat the doctors. We shall write him on these matters in a day or two."

And with a bow and wave of the hand, Mr. Rawlins, the cashier, was gone.

She stood where he had left her, with her hand pressed upon the pocket which contained the letter of introduction. What thoughts were passing through her mind at that moment? What plan was rapidly unfolding in her busy brain? Valera, safe for two months in the country with his mother, and she—left alone in New York, with *that letter in her pocket.* In an instant, everything that she had wished and feared and hoped for rushed back upon her mind—her solemn oath came to her memory—she seemed to see a path carved out before her, in which she must walk, whether she would or no. The impulsive nature of the woman began to ferment. Her eyes distended, her nostrils dilated, like those

of a war-horse scenting the battle; she stood upright and threw out her nobly-proportioned chest and shoulders as though she waited for the saddle to be put upon them. A sudden grand idea had overwhelmed her brain. It took possession of her, and she felt even at that moment that she should carry it out to the end. Every circumstance combined to make it feasible. It was Providence alone that could have directed and arranged it all, and Leona felt the same flow of conscious responsibility driving her onward, that the Maid of Orleans must have experienced when the mysterious voices urged her to the field.

She stood there where the cashier had left her for many minutes, motionless, absorbed. Then hearing herself called by name, with a heightened colour and beating heart, she returned to Valera's apartment, and related to him what she had been told.

It was the one assurance the invalid needed

to make his mind easy on the subject of the proposed journey.

"I am very glad," he kept on murmuring, in a weak but contented tone. "I shall soon get well now. I long for the country air and a sight of the fresh green fields. I shall see them before sunset to-morrow, *ma mère.*"

"Long before sunset," replied Donna Josefa, as if she were speaking to a weary child, "and then you shall lie on the grass, *Tobalito mio*, and under the shady trees, until you feel quite strong and hearty again."

"How I *long* to be there!" repeated the sick man earnestly. "Oh! how I *long* to be there!"

His whole mind seemed to be set on the idea of getting away from the little heated room where he had suffered so much pain, and been kept a prisoner for so long. It was natural it should be so. Illness is apt to make us very selfish, and forgetful of every one's

feelings but our own, and Leona should have been able to make allowances for the condition in which the fever had left her adopted brother. Yet, her proud loving heart swelled with pain as she listened to this little conversation between the mother and the son; though she felt it was another incentive to her not to falter in the path she had chalked out for herself, but to crush every consideration under foot which should attempt to interfere with the fulfilment of the oath she had sworn to keep. Meanwhile, not a word was said about the letter of introduction to the English firm. If the remembrance of it crossed Valera's mind at all, he did not consider it of sufficient consequence to mention. By the time the sun rose next morning, his boxes were packed ready for him to start. By the time it had reached its meridian, Leona stood in his deserted apartments alone. The mother and son were far on their road towards

the green fields and shady trees Valera longed for, and even at the last moment he had not appeared to feel the parting with Leona. He who in health became serious if she were but a few hours out of his sight, appeared able to leave her in that great city, friendless, alone, without a fear. The fact is, Valera was too weak to feel anything, except his weakness.

His attenuated hand shook as it lay in hers. The mouth she kissed in farewell was parched, and cracked, and dry. Even the touch of her fresh rosy lips had had no power to excite any response from his.

"Adieu, *m'amie*," he had said, affectionately, but calmly. "Pray that we may meet in happier times. I wish you were coming with us, Leona, but I have kept you from your work too long already. I can never thank you sufficiently for your goodness to me, *m'amie*. Never, never."

And with that Valera had sunk back

languidly on the pillows provided for his support, and closed his eyes from the mere exertion of framing those few words.

The carriage drove slowly away, and Leona returned to the vacated rooms to look at them once more, before she took her own departure. The litter attendant upon packing was strewn about them—the bed, from which Christobal had with difficulty been induced to rise, was tossed and tumbled as he had left it. As the girl regarded the place, where for the last six weeks she had played the *rôle* of a most devoted nurse and companion, and realised that her work was completed, and the end for which she had worked accomplished, she was angry with the tears that, despite her best efforts, would rise to her softened eyes.

"Why am I behaving like a fool?" she said sharply, as she brushed them away. "A short time ago I did not expect Christobal to live. There might have been something to cry for!

But he is not only better, but out of all danger, and in another hour or so will be well removed from the influence of the city and its surroundings—will return to it probably stronger than he ever was before. It is often the case that a good fever clears and strengthens the constitution. I heard the doctor say so! Then I am a fool to weep for that which should make me glad."

She passed into the bedchamber as she spoke, and nervously picking up a few pieces of packing paper from the floor, let them drop again.

"Poor Christal!" she thought, as she glanced at the ruffled pillows, "how many restless nights has he spent upon that bed. How terrible it was to hear him call out in his delirium. Shall I ever forget the time when he leaped from the bed and insisted upon leaving the room! How frightened I was, more so than I have ever been in my life

before! I thought that night that he was dying! Oh, my poor brother! What should I have done if he had left me? I have no real friend in the world but him."

Here the rebel tears commenced to fall upon the bedclothes, but Leona did not seem to notice them.

"Poor, poor Tobal! How much he has suffered! How his eyes would follow me about the room, even when he did not seem to recognise me, as though he were imploring me to quench his thirst and mitigate his pain. Once, when I was bathing his head with vinegar, he called me 'Queen of Heaven,' and tried to kneel to me. He always had a grateful heart, my poor Tobal! and he has loved me from the time when we were little children together, and I don't believe, I can't believe—— Oh! I wish, I wish," cried the girl, passionately, as she threw herself upon the deserted pillows, "that he had said just a little more at parting than he did."

She sobbed for a few minutes convulsively, then, starting up, as if ashamed of displaying so much weakness even to herself, she dried her eyes rapidly, and, rising, walked up and down the room.

"*Madre di Dios!*" she exclaimed, impatiently, "what am I thinking of? Crying, positively crying, when I ought to be laughing —because my friend is well. *Ought to be laughing!* I *am* laughing—of course I'm laughing!" And here the merriment which she forced from herself sounded sadder than tears. "Or if I'm not, I ought to be whipped. But what fools we women are! Why wasn't I born a man? I might have had more sense in me then. Tobal has double my sense. *He* wouldn't be such a pig as to cry because I had just recovered from a serious illness. I must be going to take the fever myself, I fancy, and that won't do with all I have before me."

She clapped her hand upon her pocket

as she spoke, and felt the outline of the letter she had placed there. The touch of it seemed to infuse fresh spirit in her.

"I have ten thousand things to do before to-morrow," she said impulsively, "and I waste my precious time here, whimpering like a school-girl. Leona Lacoste, *I hate you!* You have no more spirit, nor energy, nor courage than the rest of your sex. You have been shut up in these close little rooms with that poor weak boy till you are as bad as himself. Fancy! my *actually crying* because the child was too ill to make me a long speech of thanks and compliments before he started on his travels—when I hate compliments into the bargain! Saint Jago! what shall I require next?"

All this time she had been collecting the few articles that belonged to her, and which she could carry in a basket on her arm. Now she flung her mantilla over her shoulders,

and placed a broad-brimmed hat upon her head.

"*Au revoir, mon frère!*" she said, lightly, as she kissed her fingers in the direction of the empty bed. "Please the saints we shall meet again, to laugh together over this little adventure. And I will tease thee, Tobalito, with the account of thine uncomplimentary farewell, and how foolishly vexed I was to think of it afterwards. *Au revoir!* May it be long before I have to watch thee on a sick-bed again, *chère!*"

She turned to leave the room with the same mocking smile upon her lips—the innocent jest upon her tongue. But before she had crossed the threshold she rushed back, and, with a sudden impulse, fell on her knees and pressed fond passionate kisses upon the pillows which had held the sick man's head.

"The good God have thee in his safe keeping ever, my friend and brother!" she

said fervently, as she rose to her feet again and hurried from the apartment, ashamed of the emotion into which she had been betrayed.

* * * * *

"Here's a nuisance!" exclaimed Mr. Burrage to his stage-manager a few mornings afterwards.

"What's up now?"

"That jade, d'Acosta, after having kept me waiting for her for six weeks past, sends word she is obliged to leave New York."

"Why?"

"She doesn't give her reasons, only that she's unfit for work, and must have change. She doesn't even say where she's going to, or when she is coming back. So much for the dependence to be placed on a woman. The fact is, she's been nursing that black-eyed brute she calls her brother through a fever, and I suppose he's been ordered away, and so she must go too."

"That's about the long and short," replied the other. "You know I never believed in that brother of d'Acosta's."

"Well, whoever he is, he's a deuced lucky fellow to have such a nurse. But how am I to replace her? That's the question."

"Ah, I suppose he's been asking the same. I'm sure I can't answer it. You're sure d'Acosta's gone?"

"Sure. I sent word at once to her lodgings; she left yesterday."

"Well, it's no use crying over spilt milk. We must do the best we can without her. Did you write to England by yesterday's mail?"

"By Jove! no. I quite forgot it," cried Mr. Burrage; and in the annoyance caused by the omission, Elena d'Acosta's sudden disappearance was for awhile forgotten.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE IN HYDE PARK GARDENS.

When Mr. Henry Evans, head of the well-known firm of Evans and Troubridge, of Liverpool, had, by dint of hard work and steady application to business, doubled and trebled the fortune left him by his uncle some two-and-twenty years before, he thought it time to set up an establishment in London. So he gave up the fine house with its gardens, and hothouses, and pineries, in which he had lived ever since he was married, and which he had furnished with every luxury and convenience procurable by money—he left the friends by whom he had been surrounded since his youth, who had known him through

trouble and joy, and been faithful to him under every aspect of life; and came to a new place, to take up his residence amongst strangers, and to find himself encompassed by people and manners and customs to which he was as foreign as though he had belonged to another country. He felt uncomfortable and ill at ease—so did his wife—so, doubtless, did his daughter; but it was the correct thing to do, consequently they did it. People who have been fortunate enough to amass sufficient money to lift all pecuniary care for the future off their shoulders, always seem to imagine that their first duty lies in spending it amongst and upon strangers, instead of the friends and tradesmen who have most claim on them. In consequence of their wealth they find themselves surrounded and courted by a higher class than that with which they originally associated, and they feel that they must needs put themselves on a par with their new acquaintances,

by going where they go and seeing what they have seen. And thus it often comes to pass that the fortune it has taken nearly a lifetime to accumulate is frittered away upon a set of aristocratic and fashionable "sharpers," who flatter the *nouveau riche* simply for what he gives them, and laugh at him behind his back for his simplicity and ignorance, and general want of knowledge of society.

Mr. Henry Evans was naturally somewhat above the regulation "*nouveau riche*," both in education and social status. He had held a high place in the society of his native town, and had spent a great deal of his time in London. His birth, manners, and appearance were those of a gentleman, and he was fitted by them to move amongst the noblest in the land. But he had never actually resided in London, and was quite ready to take the advice of anyone as to what he should "eat, drink, and avoid" in that bewildering city. His wife,

also, although the kindest-hearted, most retiring, and modest of ladies, had never moved out of the country in her life, and was quite astray amidst the confusion of a London season; and his daughter Lucilla, who had been an invalid for many years past, was unable to do more than follow the lead of her parents. When the three, therefore, found themselves installed in a splendid house in Hyde Park Gardens, and called upon to give large dinners, and dances, and afternoon receptions, in return for civilities shown to them, they felt very much like children led about blindfold, and were thankful—Mrs. Evans especially—to anyone who would kindly take the unusual trouble of entertaining their guests off their hands. And anybody who knows what London is, and what a number of harpies it contains in the shape of needy men and women going about seeking whom they may devour, and ready to bow down and worship the first person they meet who will

give them a good dinner, will readily understand how many offers of assistance in dispensing her hospitality good Mrs. Evans received.

There was more reason, perhaps, for Mr. Evans' shifting his quarters from Liverpool to London than for most men in the same predicament. Of late years the firm to which he belonged had greatly increased its connection. The branch establishment in London was crowded with traders and correspondents of all nations, and for these strangers, cast adrift on the inhospitable shores of our metropolis (and no city is less hospitable to a stranger), some sort of entertainment was needed. It was this knowledge that put the first thought of a town residence into Mr. Evans' head. Not but what he might have deputed some one to the office, but he was the head of the firm, and Lucilla had seen nothing of the world; and after all it was the proper thing to do. And so Mrs. Evans, who was

one of those good old-fashioned wives who consider that their husbands are intended to rule the house, and who, moreover, may have felt a little elated at the prospect of presiding over an establishment in London, readily acquiesced in his decision. So the house in Hyde Park Gardens was taken for a term of years, and whilst the decorators and upholsterers were having it all their own way, the Evans went abroad, that they might not be behind their neighbours in familiarity with the "grand tour." Having accomplished which feat (with much discomfort and at considerable outlay), they took up their quarters in their new house, where they soon found themselves surrounded by a bevy of accommodating friends, all eager to assist "Dear Mrs. Evans" in her shopping or housekeeping, or to become "dear Lucilla's" nurse and companion, so long as they could repay themselves by driving in Mrs. Evans' carriage, using Mrs. Evans'

purse, eating Mrs. Evans' dinners, and even, on particular occasions, coming in for "pickings" from Mrs. Evans' wardrobe, or any other of her possessions. For the sort of friend to which I allude is never "proud." It is amazing, for all their appetites, what amount of humble-pie they will eat from the hands of those who know how to make use of them.

* * * * *

It was the month of May, and it was evening. From the lower part of the house in Hyde Park Gardens the various sounds of bustle and movement, with occasional bursts of laughter and conversation, showed that a dinner-party was, as usual, going on. In the large drawing-room overhead, furnished with blue satin and gold, Lucilla Evans, the daughter of the house, lay on a couch alone. By her side was a small table, holding strawberries and cream and wine, but she appeared to have pushed it impatiently away. She was too

weak to join her father's dinner-parties, so she always waited thus the return of her mother and the other ladies. She had no organic disease, but she had suffered from a weak spine for many years past, and it prevented her taking any active part in life. And the restraint made her fractious. As she listened now to the sounds of feasting from below, her pale face, which might have been pretty, had she enjoyed better health, contracted with pain and envy. She knew she had no right to complain, but it seemed hard that all those people should be eating and drinking at her parents' expense, and making merry over their meal, whilst she, the only child and heiress of the house, should have to lie there unable to partake of it. She turned restlessly upon her sofa as the idea passed through her brain, and she wondered how many of them ever bestowed a thought upon her upstairs whilst they were gratifying their appetites and their vanity.

Yet, except for that which it was Heaven's will she should endure, Lucilla Evans had little reason for complaint. She was positively the idol of her parents. Not a wish she ever expressed was left ungratified. She was clothed in purple and fine linen, she fared sumptuously every day. And she would have exchanged it all to enjoy a beggar's health and strength. It is the way of the world. The rich clothes she wore, the luxuries which surrounded her, were as nothing compared to the one thing she lacked. She ever seemed to take pleasure in crumpling and otherwise ill-using the delicate muslin trimmed with the finest of lace in which she could be arrayed, as she tossed from side to side upon her satin couch.

It was infinite relief to her to hear the voices on the staircase which told her that the ladies were ascending to the drawing-room. Lizzie Vereker, a fine handsome girl of two or three and twenty, a perfect specimen of the

fast young lady of the nineteenth century, was the first to enter.

"Why, my dear, how dark you are!" she exclaimed. "But deliciously cool! You should have felt it downstairs. I thought I should have fainted. And that wretch Rivers has been making me laugh so with his nonsense that I had no time to eat my dinner. How are you dear? Better?"

This being a question which was put to Miss Evans by all her lady friends whenever they saw her—which was, moreover, so utterly unanswerable—she took no notice of it whatever.

"You should have the gas lighted, Mrs. Evans," exclaimed an old maid, by name Miss Forrester, who had nobly undertaken the task of setting Mrs. Evans right upon every particular, even to selecting her acquaintances for her. "You should give your man orders always to light the gas before the ladies come up from the dinner-table."

"Oh, of course! I had forgotten it. I am so very stupid," said poor Mrs. Evans, as she trotted across the room to ring the bell.

"Sit down, marquise," continued Miss Forrester, in the most hospitable manner, as she ensconced a pretty fashionably-dressed woman into the largest arm-chair. "I'm sure you're tired. You looked so pale at dinner."

The marquise (it is to be presumed she had some other name, but as her friends always addressed her as if she were the only marquise in the world, it was difficult to arrive at the truth of the matter) took the seat of honour as though she were entitled to it.

"I *do* feel very tired," she said, fanning herself. "These interminable heavy dinners are distressingly fatiguing."

Miss Forrester leant over her and whispered, "They don't know how to do the thing at all, poor creatures; how should they!

Mais on doit souffrir—you know the rest, my dear."

The marquise, who was considerably powdered and painted, and could not therefore afford to over-exert herself in any way, laughed gently, and lay back in the arm-chair with closed eyes.

"What do you think of the new importation?" asked her friend.

"The boy, my dear? Oh! he's a pretty boy enough. I've asked him to come and see me to-morrow afternoon."

"Your friend, Sir Sydney, may not approve of that, Fifine."

"My dear, what nonsense! As if anyone in his right mind could suppose I should ask a child to visit me except out of kindness; his manners are too brusque for society. I mean to polish him up a little."

Meanwhile Mrs. Evans had approached her daughter. She was a charming lady in ap-

pearance, not old, not half old enough looking, in fact, to be the mother of the careworn sickly girl upon the sofa—but dressed, by comparison with her guests, so dowdily as to seem twice her age. For although her clothes were rich, and made by good milliners, Mrs. Evans wore them in such a manner as to mar all their fashionable beauties. Her dark-brown moiré dress hung on her as if she had been a broomstick, whilst her point-lace *fichu* was twisted like a ribbon round her throat, and her ruffles hung limply from her wrists. Her abundant hair slightly streaked with gray, was tucked away in the staidest manner beneath a matronly cap; for in one particular Mrs. Evans had proved obstinately deaf to the reasoning and advice of her new friends. She would not change the fashion of her cap. She considered the fly-away, fluttering head-dresses which the *modistes* assured her to be the latest fashion, outrageous, and unbecoming (not to say in-

decent) for a woman of her age; and laugh at her as her friends might, she insisted upon retaining the shape and style which she and her mother before her had always worn. Therefore, though the materials of which her evening cap was composed were irreproachable, it still covered her head, and tied down cosily round her cheerful, pleasant little face, as she came smiling to Lucilla's side.

"Well, my dear, and how do you feel this evening? Not touched your strawberries! Why, how's that? Come, do try some; they are so refreshing."

"I didn't want them," replied the girl, peevishly. "Who's downstairs to-night, mother? What are they doing?"

"Well, there's papa, of course, and Dr. Hastings."

"He's always there. I am sure you might miss him. I'm sick of his name."

"Oh Lucilla, my dear! and when he's so

good to you. What we should have done without him on the tour, I'm sure I don't know. What with interpreting for us at the railway stations, and guiding us about, and looking after you, he was quite our salvation."

"We've had enough of him since, anyway. Who else is there?"

"Captain Rivers and Sir Sydney Marchant."

Lucilla drew her mother's ear down to her mouth and whispered:

"Is he *that woman's* friend?"

"What woman, my dear?" replied Mrs. Evans, in the same tone.

"That marquise, or whatever she is."

"My dear! she is the Marquise de Toutlemonde, a person of very high connections. Miss Forrester assures me——"

"Never mind it now, mother. I hate her, that's all; and wish Miss F. would keep her friends to herself. Who else was at dinner?"

"No one—except the young American."

"What young American?"

"Well, Spaniard, I suppose I should say; only papa says he is connected with his American partners, and has come over on the business of the firm. Such a strange-looking lad, my dear; and so handsome. Doesn't appear to be more than eighteen or nineteen, too; but he must be older, papa tells me."

"What's his name?"

"Don—Don—— There, it's quite slipped my memory. But I never can manage these foreign names. Miss Forrester, can you remember what the young gentleman from America is called?"

"Don Christobal Valera," replied Madame La Marquise de Toutlemonde.

"Thank you, marquise. Though I wonder you should think of it so readily."

"Well, *I* should, if anyone, Mrs. Evans, considering he is a countryman of mine."

"Are you Spanish?" demanded Lizzie Vereker, bluntly.

"Certainly. I was born and brought up in Andalusia."

"I shouldn't have thought it, to hear you speak."

"Why not?"

"Your English is so fluent. I suppose it is due to your having lived so long in town; but really, if you hadn't told me to the contrary, I should have said it had quite the cockney ring about it."

The marquise changed the subject by turning and speaking to Miss Forrester in a low tone.

"A very unpleasant sort of girl that—so pert and outspoken in her remarks."

"Particularly so. Wants putting down, I should say. By the way, Miss Vereker, are we to congratulate you?"

"On what?"

"Your engagement to Captain Rivers. You are engaged to him, are you not?"

"Most decidedly not. To become engaged to anyone is the last thing in the world that I think of doing."

"Indeed. I am surprised to hear it. I imagined you were rather partial to the gentleman than otherwise."

"So I am, Miss Forrester; very partial, indeed. I like them all so much, in fact, that I never shall be able to make up my mind to tie myself down to one."

Madame de Toutlemonde closed her eyes, and looked disgusted, as though such a sentiment were altogether too immoral for her to listen to.

"You have shocked Fifine here," quoth Miss Forrester. "She is not accustomed to hear such strong opinions from young unmarried ladies."

It was Miss Vereker's turn then.

"I daresay not. It is the married women nowadays that 'out-Herod Herod.' By the way, marquise, how is your poor husband?"

"Much the same, thank you."

"How distressing it must be for you to be obliged always to leave him at home, and to be dependent on the kindness of your gentlemen friends for escort. Is it true that Sir Sydney Marchant is your cousin?"

"Who told you so?" demanded the marquise, with a faint access of colour to her cheek.

"No one. But young Taylor mentioned you had given it out at your own dinner-table the other day. So I thought perhaps it might be true."

"He is a sort of cousin, of my husband's."

"Of the marquis? Really, how strange! Because I know all the Marchants well, and they particularly pride themselves on the unsullied purity of their race."

"Have you any engagement for to-morrow?" suddenly demanded Madame of Miss Forrester.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"I want so much to go to the Crystal Palace Dog Show, and one of my horses has fallen lame."

"Oh, I daresay Mrs. Evans is going, and will be pleased to take you. Mrs. Evans!" raising her voice to reach across the room.

"Yes, Miss Forrester."

"Of course you're going to the Dog Show at the Crystal Palace to-morrow?"

"I didn't know there was to be one."

"Didn't know! Why, my good creature, where are your eyes. It's posted all over the town. You must go. The Palace will be crammed."

"I am so afraid of the heat and crowd for Lucilla. She cannot stand for any time without suffering from it."

"It's not the place for Lucilla, certainly."

"And I don't care to go without her, you see."

"But I'll go with you with pleasure, and so will the marquise, I'm sure. We intended going, and it's all one to us who we go with. When shall you start? About three o'clock I think will be a nice time. We shall be able then to drive comfortably down there and back before dinner-time."

"Well, if you really think I ought to go," said poor Mrs. Evans, dubiously.

"There's no thinking in the matter. I'm sure of it," returned Miss Forrester. "Anyway, Fifine, and I will be here by three to-morrow, and then, if you really don't wish to go——"

"You and Madame will take the carriage and go without me," interposed her hostess. "Ah, that's very good of you. And then you can tell me all about it on your return. For

if Lucilla should happen to be too unwell to join us, I really would rather stay by her."

"Well, you must do as you choose about that, of course, Mrs. Evans. But at all events the marquise and I will keep our engagement with you. Won't we, Fifine?"

"Just as you like, dear. It will make no difference to me," responded the marquise, amiably.

At this juncture, the door opened to admit three of the gentlemen, Sir Sydney Marchant, Captain Rivers, and Dr. Hastings. Sir Sydney was a middle-aged, overblown, sensual-looking man, unpleasant to contemplate, and unpleasant to know—at all events, to most people. From the effusive manner in which he was received by his cousin, Madame de Toutlemonde, however, it may be presumed that she was an exception to the rest of the world.

Captain Rivers was a tall, good-looking

soldier, who was evidently on the best of terms with Miss Lizzie Vereker, and lost no time in securing the seat next to her.

Dr. Hastings (or Tom Hastings, as he was called by all his intimate friends) was neither handsome nor tall; but he had a good and strong face, with kind, clever eyes, and a great sense of humour in his composition. He was a Liverpool man, and had known the Evans in their old home, and gladly renewed the acquaintanceship in London. He did not consider Lucilla's case hopeless, and constantly cheered her parents and herself with the prospect that another year or two would see her outgrow the constitutional debility. Mr. Evans thought very highly of the young man's talent, and had installed him as medical adviser to the family. He had even taken him on the "grand tour" with them, that Lucilla's health might not suffer from any imprudence on their part. And his confidence

was justified by that of the public. Dr. Hastings was a very clever and rising surgeon, and deserved all his friends thought or said of him. He was, moreover, a man of the world, and not to be easily deceived. During his town practice, he had visited with all sorts of people, and had his eyes wide open. For this reason there were a few ladies and gentlemen (Madame de Toutlemonde and Sir Sydney Marchant, for example) who both hated and feared Dr. Hastings, and lost no occasion of speaking against him. It was strange, however, that Lucilla Evans should have taken a distaste (it was scarcely to be called a dislike) to the man who had really benefited her health, and was so constantly attentive to her—strange, that is to say, to anyone who did not know the secret of her heart and his. For the cause lay in the fact that Dr. Hastings *was* too attentive, and that his attentions bore a deeper meaning than mere interest in her as a

patient. He was fond of Lucilla Evans, and she felt the influence without acknowledging it; and not being prepared to return his affection, it worried instead of pleasing her. She was a nervous, sensitive girl, who had been brought up in the country, and unused to be flirted with or dangled after, and she could not bear to see that Dr. Hastings' eyes rested on her longer than was necessary, or that he lowered his voice when he addressed her. It would have delighted Lizzie Vereker, who would have drawn on the unfortunate doctor by her smiles and whispers until he was beside himself; but it only made Lucilla Evans fractious and uncomfortable. As he entered the room that evening, and at once made his way up to her side, she bounded into a sitting position with such alacrity as must have been hurtful to her weakened spine.

"Why do you rise? You shouldn't move so quickly—you will injure yourself," he said,

gently, as he reached the sofa. "You had better lie down again, or you will not be able to sit up when Mr. Evans comes, and then he will be disappointed."

"I am so *sick* of lying down," said the girl, with a sigh. Yet she did as he told her, notwithstanding.

"I am sure you are. No one feels more for you than I do, who know so well what you suffer. But patience, Lucy" (he had been allowed by reason of their early acquaintance to fall into the habit of addressing her by her christian-name), "and it will all come right in the end."

"So *you* say," she answered, somewhat ungraciously. "I shall believe it when I see it."

He took no notice of her mood.

"Have you been out to-day?"

"We drove in the park, as usual. And, as usual, Miss Forrester was stuck beside me

all the way, and mamma had to sit on the back seat."

"Miss Forrester appears to be always with you now."

"Not by *my* wish, Dr. Hastings; you may be sure of that. But she is continually popping in at odd moments; and what can mamma do, when the carriage is waiting at the door, but ask her to accompany us? But she is preferable to her friend."

"By the way, I wanted to ask you, Lucy, who is that lady in pink and white?"

"The marquise of something or other."

"How did you come to know her?"

"Miss Forrester brought her here to call on mamma."

"Where does she live?"

"I don't know. Somewhere in Bayswater, but mamma returned the call alone."

"Is she married?"

"Oh, of course. To an old fellow, I believe,

who cares for nothing but chemistry and experiments, and is always ill. And so she goes about with Miss Forrester. At least so mamma says. I don't like the woman myself. She's too affected to please me. And I think that man she takes about with her is horrid."

Dr. Hastings looked grave.

"I wish your mamma would be more careful whom she admits to her acquaintance," he said. "There can be very little sympathy between you and this marquise, I should think."

"But she is a great friend of Miss Forrester's," put in Lucilla.

"Yes, yes, exactly so," replied her companion, and then he turned and looked at Madame de Toutlemonde for a little while, as if he had seen her before, and was silent.

"Where's the young American papa brought home to dinner?" demanded Lucilla of him, presently.

"I don't know, I'm sure. Mr. Evans took him into the study, I think, for a little conversation."

"Is he so very handsome, as they say?"

"Handsome! Not a bit of it. He's got a pretty face, but that is not generally considered desirable in a man. He's quite a lad, with the merest down upon his upper lip. The Spanish correspondent, I think your father told me, of some American firm. I don't think you will take much interest in him, Lucilla."

"I don't take much interest in anything," she answered, wearily.

"You shall, some day. Meanwhile, would you like some music? Shall I ask Miss Vereker to sing?"

"I prefer talking. Is this Spaniard very dark?"

"Harping on that Spaniard again! What makes you think of him? No; his hair and

eyes are of a reddish colour, I believe, but I really forget. I was not so interested in his appearance as you seem to be."

"I hate dark hair," said Lucilla, brusquely.

Tom Hastings sighed, and passed his hand ruefully through his own dark hair, which, from much thought and study, was plentifully sprinkled with gray.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SPANISH CORRESPONDENT.

MEANWHILE Mr. Evans and the young gentleman who had introduced himself to him as Don Christobal Valera were closeted together, as Dr. Hastings had surmised, in the study.

"A few words with you, Don Valera, if you please," the host had said, as the men quitted the dining-room, and he led the way into his sanctum.

The stranger followed in silence. As they entered the study and took seats opposite each other, and the lamp-light fell upon his face, Mr. Evans could not help remarking how youthful his figure was, and how delicately his features were chiselled.

"Do you smoke?" he inquired, as he pushed a box of cigars towards him. His companion took one, lighted it, and for a few moments they smoked together in silence.

"Messrs. Halliday and Upjohn must have reposed great confidence in you to have chosen you for such an office, Don Valera," commenced Mr. Evans.

"I am young, sir, but I believe myself competent to master all the details of the proposed speculation, and to carry back your ideas and wishes to the New York firm with accuracy."

"I have no doubt of it. The credentials you bring with you are all-sufficient. You have known Messrs. Halliday and Upjohn for more than a year."

"For more than a year, sir."

"And have been their Spanish correspondent for that period?"

"I can write fluently in Spanish, French,

or Portuguese, sir. I will give you a specimen of my style, if you will permit me."

"There is no occasion, Don Valera. I have every faith in your assertion. But as the negotiations by which we hope to extend the business of the firm entail correspondence with certain Spanish houses, it was as well to make sure of your ability to conduct it. I may even have to send you to Madrid on the same business."

"I am at your command, sir, and only too ready to do anything you may require. Am I likely to have to start soon?"

"By no means. There's no hurry at all about the matter; in fact, we can hardly get things in train under a month or so. Meanwhile, where are you staying? Have you friends in London?

"None! I am an entire stranger here. I slept last night at an hotel."

"Then you must accept the hospitality of my house during your visit to England."

"But it will be imposing on your goodness," stammered the stranger. "It is really too much."

"Not another word, my dear sir," said Mr. Evans. "I will not hear of your leaving us again. Your room is ready for you, and I will send to the hotel for your things. Don't think twice about it. We are very seldom without guests in the house, and I make a point of entertaining all the gentlemen who come to London on business connected with the firm. But you are very, *very* young," he added, laying a patronising hand on his visitor's shoulder.

"I am older than I seem," was the youth's reply. He evidently did not like his age being alluded to. Gentlemen who can boast of as much down on their upper lips as the peel of

an apple do usually try to change the subject when years are made the topic of conversation.

"That matter being settled," said Mr. Evans cheerfully, "suppose we join the ladies in the drawing-room. I have still to introduce you to my daughter."

As he followed his host up the broad staircase the young stranger could not help looking earnestly at him. He saw before him a man of perhaps forty years of age, in appearance much younger, with a fair complexion, made florid by good living, mirthful blue eyes, reddish hair, which was more than "reddish" in his whiskers, and a tall, well-rounded figure. The stranger thought of another head of hair prematurely whitened, of another pair of eyes dimmed with sorrow, of a stooping attenuated form, and a mournful voice, and seeming to gain courage from the recollection, ascended the staircase with a firm step and a resolute expression of countenance. His ap-

pearance in the drawing-room caused some little commotion. Lucilla Evans moved tranquilly into an arm-chair, Madame de Toutlemonde roused herself from her state of semi-drowsiness, and Lizzie Vereker neglected to attend to what Captain Rivers was saying to her, as she watched the introduction that was taking place between the young Spaniard and the daughter of their host.

"Don Valera, this is Miss Evans. Lucy, my dear, let me present to you Don Christobal Valera, who has come all the way from New York to visit our firm on business, and who will be our guest, I trust, until it shall be concluded."

Lucilla Evans raised her eyes to the stranger's countenance and withdrew them instantly, blushing deeply. There was something in the face of the new comer that attracted her at once. He, on the contrary, saw nothing before him but a pallid, sickly-looking

woman, of almost five-and-twenty years of age, of whom his first idea was how little she resembled either her father or her mother, and how much too old she appeared to be their daughter. But as the young lady seemed willing enough after the first minute to talk and laugh with him, he conquered his feeling of indifference, and did his best to make himself agreeable.

"This is your first visit to our country, I presume, Don?" she commenced.

"Quite the first, mademoiselle. I was born and brought up in the Brazils."

"Oh! I thought you were a Spaniard?"

"It is not impossible to be a Spaniard and yet never to have seen one's native country."

"True! I had forgot! But you live in New York now?"

"I do, mademoiselle."

"It is a beautiful country, is it not? I have always felt most interested in America,

and longed to visit it. But I shall never do that," with a heavy sigh.

"I will tell mademoiselle all she may desire to know," said the stranger, as he ensconced himself in the chair next to her; "that is to say if the relation can afford her any pleasure."

But this monopoly of the Spanish hero on the part of Lucilla Evans did not please Miss Vereker, who immediately quitted Captain Rivers' side to take possession of another seat close to the young couple.

"I want to hear all about New York, too, Don Valera," she interrupted, archly. "I am greatly interested in hearing about new places. Are there many theatres there?"

"Many, mademoiselle, and most beautifully fitted up and decorated."

"Did you often go to them?"

"Very often."

"How often? Twice a week?"

"More than that, sometimes I went several nights in succession."

"Oh, that must have been charming!" exclaimed Lucilla. "I have so often longed to be able to go to the play, but the fatigue is too much for me. What would I not give to be as strong as you are."

"Each back is fitted to the burden, mademoiselle," said the stranger, gently, "and no one of us can know what the other bears. There are worse calamities in life than the inability to attend theatres."

"Tell me more," said Lucilla. "I like to hear you talk. Have you left many friends behind you?"

"None," replied her companion, bitterly; then, recovering himself, he added, "except a brother. And when I last saw him he was almost too ill to speak."

"That was very sad. I hope he will soon get better, and perhaps be able to join you."

"Do you sing, Don Valera?" interrupted Lizzie Vereker.

"I do, mademoiselle."

"Then do go to the piano and sing us a song; we are really getting as dull as ditch-water. I shall be forced to return to Captain Rivers if this goes on."

"I do not sing to the pianoforte, or I should be happy to oblige you."

"What do you sing to, then?"

"My guitar."

"And have you got it with you?"

"It is amongst my luggage."

In another minute the guitar had been sent for, and unpacked, and laid in its owner's hands. He tuned it, played a short prelude, and then burst into one of those inspiriting Neapolitan tarantellas, the airs of which are so catching.

His voice was rich and mellow, the music a mere bagatelle, the accompaniment light and

subdued, and Lucilla Evans, whose nervous organisation could not stand the noise of a shrill voice and a shrieking bravura, was delighted with the singer and the singing, and as soon as the song was concluded begged for another. Don Valera complied by playing a lively Spanish cachuca, which charmed his listener more than the first had done. The picturesque appearance of the musician, together with the novelty of his instrument (for it is a rare thing to hear the guitar well played in England at the present period), made a great impression on the female portion of his audience, and, with the exception of Mr. Evans, proportionately disgusted the men. But that good man, pleased with anything that brought a smile to his daughter's face, applauded the young Spaniard almost as much as the ladies had done, and Don Valera sang ballad after ballad, until some of the company, tired of

being kept out in the cold, proposed adjournment to the billiard-room.

"Hang it all," cried Captain Rivers, as he entered that refuge with Sir Sydney Marchant and Tom Hastings. "Enough's as good as a feast. I was getting positively sick of that fellow's squalling. And to see all the women hanging over him in that absurd manner is too tantalising, 'pon my soul it is."

"What they can see in him to hang over I can't imagine," grumbled Tom Hastings. "A fat Spaniard tinkling a guitar. I bet the fellow can neither smoke, ride, nor play a game at billiards."

"None of these d——d foreigners ever can," interposed Sir Sydney. "And this one is a mere boy."

"A mere boy? He looks more like a woman stuck into boy's clothes to me. I should like to try my biceps against his,

though I believe he's taller than I am, and broader into the bargain."

"All fat, my dear Hastings, every bit of it fat. You'd knock him into the middle of next week in no time. But that's just the sort of creature the women like to rave about. They'll let him dangle after them and wind their wools, and turn over their music, and sit in their pockets all day long: see if they don't."

"But devil a one of them will marry him," growled Sir Sydney.

"Heaven forbid!" cried Tom. "One might as well talk of their marrying a pussy-cat. He looks about as soft and useless."

"I thought we'd track you," exclaimed the merry voice of Lizzie Vereker, as, followed by the marquise and Don Valera, she appeared on the threshold of the billiard-room.

"You're pretty gentlemen to slope away

in the middle of the evening, and leave us poor women to amuse ourselves."

"We thought you were so *very well* employed, Miss Vereker," said Captain Rivers pointedly, "that it seemed a pity to disturb you. Is all the singing over?"

"It is for the nonce, and I have brought the nightingale here that he may enjoy himself with the other birds of night."

"I do not suppose the Don is likely to care for pyramids," said Dr. Hastings, with a sneer. "So thoroughly English a game would have few charms for a foreigner."

"You forget that I am a New Yorker," replied Don Valera, with spirit; "and that New Yorkers have tried everything."

"Indeed. Then perhaps you will take a cue and show us how to play."

"I will show you how *we* play," returned the youth, as he made a stroke that put all that had gone before it to shame.

"Bravo!" cried Miss Vereker, clapping her hands.

"A lucky fluke," observed Rivers.

"Then I'll make another," said the stranger, as he rested his cue on his small white hand (looking so unusually small and white by those of the Englishmen present), and played a still better stroke than the first. The ladies were again loud in their plaudits, and the men began to perceive that the young Spaniard's skill was not entirely due to good luck.

"You have been used to this kind of thing, sir," observed Sir Sydney, grandly.

"I am used to everything, monsieur," was the grander answer.

"Indeed! I should like to hear a list of your accomplishments."

"An intimate acquaintance with the use of the broad-sword," replied the Don, regarding him fixedly; "and a knowledge not only how

and when to use it, but *on whom!* Do you wish to hear more?"

"By no means. That is quite enough," said Sir Sydney, uneasily. "We have no time to waste in listening to each other's boasts this evening."

"You begged the question of me, monsieur. Am I to proceed with the game or not?"

"Of course, riding is amongst your acquirements, Don Valera," said Miss Vereker, admiringly.

"It is, mademoiselle, but not in the fashion you practise it in your country. I have been used to ride bareback, or at most with a pair of stirrups slung across my mustang's saddle-cloth whilst I rode over the pathless prairie with a lasso in my hand."

"How delightful! How exciting! What adventures you must have encountered!" said Lizzie Vereker, with sparkling eyes. "And what did you lasso?"

"Wild cattle, mademoiselle, or horses. But sometimes I went pig-spearing, or shot the wild game, both large and small, which is very plentiful in the Brazils."

"That beats anything *you* have ever done," observed Lizzie to her unfortunate Captain Rivers.

"It is easy to talk," he muttered below his breath, as he moved away to another part of the room. Quite below his breath though. The new comer might be a "fat Spaniard," and "a mere boy," but since they had seen his eyes flash at the mention of the broad-sword, they had dropped the idea of thinking it worth while to insult their host's guest.

"It is from the Brazils that the dear little humming-birds come, isn't it?" asked Madame la Marquise.

"Not only the humming-bird, madame, but hundreds of other birds almost as beautiful;

and such flowers as, I imagine, you have never dreamt of in England."

"Oh! you must tell me all about them, Don."

"Any day that you wish to hear it, I am entirely at your service," he rejoined, as he applied himself afresh to the game they were playing.

Before they parted that night, the supposed Don Valera had proved to the gentlemen assembled in the Evans' house that he could not only smoke and play a game of billiards, but hold his own with the very best of them there. Lucilla Evans and Lizzie Vereker (who was staying in the house) appeared to be so much taken up with the new comer, that Captain Rivers and Dr. Hastings left them in the very worst of humours, knowing they were to be subjected to the young Spaniard's fascination without the safeguard of their presence. If they had only known

the truth, how very easy they might have made themselves.

* * * * *

As for Valera himself, so soon as he was shown up to the bedroom allotted to his use, he locked the door carefully behind him, threw off his fashionable new habiliments with a sigh of relief, and felt that for a few hours at least he might cast aside the restraint that galled him, and be what he was—*Leona Lacoste.*

"So far, so good," she thought, as she stretched herself upon her couch. "I have succeeded hitherto better than I could possibly have expected. There has not been a hitch anywhere. My voyage is over. I have met my uncle. I am located under his very roof, with permission to remain here as long as I choose. Now, if the fates are only propitious, and Halliday and Upjohn do not take it into their heads to write some letter concerning

Tobal that shall upset my plans, I shall probably gain a clear month to work in.

"Dear Tobal. I wonder how he is progressing, and if the country air has made him strong again. The worst part of this business has been to cut myself off from all communication with him. What will he think of me, *mon pauvre frère?* What will he say? Oh, *Tobalito mio,* I could have done it for naught but one thing—*My Father's Name!* The girl Lucilla fancies me, I can see plainly. How strange it is that I, who in a woman's garb am generally disliked by women, should excite their sympathies directly I assume clothes to which I have no right. All the girls fell in love with me on the stage when I appeared as a boy. Bah, the fools! How short-sighted they must be. But I must not blame them for it now. Their folly may prove my salvation.

"Lucilla Evans is everything in this

house, I can perceive that; therefore, to obtain her favour is to become a general favourite. And I must work upon her liking for me, in order to gain sufficient general information to commence my investigation upon. She looks shrewd, and she is not very young. If I am any judge of age, hers must be five-and-twenty at the least. If that is true, and this sad business happened two-and-twenty years ago, she may even remember to have heard it spoken of.

"But stop! of what am I thinking?

"That man—the Boston manager—said that my poor father was the elder son, and he was only two-and-twenty at the time of the murder.

"My uncle could not have been married so soon. How then can he have a daughter of that age? She must be younger than I imagined!

"Yet I cannot believe it. There are lines

in her face which nothing but the passage of time will bring. How totally unlike she is to both her parents. Not a single feature is the same. She looks as if she came of a different race altogether. Anyway my first endeavour must be to make great friends with her, and hear all the family may have to tell me of the details of that terrible time."

* * * * *

Acting upon this determination, Leona exerted herself to the utmost to foster the fancy that Lucilla appeared to have taken for her. She hovered about her couch all day, delicately attentive to her many little wants, and always ready to converse or to hold her tongue as the invalid seemed best inclined. Dr. Hastings, who had been accustomed in his rough way to fetch and carry for Lucilla, but whose intentions had ever been better than his mode of carrying them out, sunk terribly in

her estimation as a nurse by comparison with the new comer. Don Valera's voice was so low and musical, it never went through her head as poor Tom's did; and his hands were so firm and gentle, he never let the cushions slip, or clashed the teacups, or made any other jar to startle and alarm her. And he would sit for hours by her sofa reading to her, or talking of those far-off beautiful countries which she could never hope to see for herself, singing quaint foreign songs to the soft accompaniment of his guitar. In a few days it seemed as though Lucilla could go nowhere and enjoy nothing, unless this Spanish youth were by her side. She drove out with him in the carriage, he walked beside her invalid-chair in the Park, he carried her meals up to the drawing-room; in fact he waited on her like a servant, and became more necessary to her happiness every day. Mr. and Mrs. Evans saw their daughter smiling and contented, and

were delighted with the improvement, never minding whence it came; Leona perceived the influence she was gaining over Lucilla's mind, and praised heaven for the good fortune that had given her such an ally. Since they conversed, when together, on every topic under the sun, it was not difficult to her woman's tact, to bring round the conversation to the subject she preferred to speak on; and thus it came to pass that, as they were driving together one morning, about a week after her arrival, in the quiet shady roads round Wimbledon and Roehampton, she made her first attempt to gain some information respecting the Liverpool murder.

"How lovely the trees are!" observed Lucilla. "Who would think we were but a few miles out of London? I should think your Brazilian forests could hardly boast of finer specimens than those chestnuts, Don Valera?"

"Ah, mademoiselle! you can have no idea of the vegetation of the Brazils until you see it. It is almost too beautiful for earth. And yet amidst such wealth of loveliness as nature shows us there, people can still rob and ill-treat, and murder one another! Crime is not so prevalent, I think, in this climate. You are colder, more patient, and more forgiving than the children of the south."

"I don't think we are! We have dreadful murders committed in England, sometimes; but mamma does not like me to read such accounts, because I dream of them at night. It must be terrible to be murdered; to have your throat cut, or to be shot, or poisoned. The mere thought of it makes me shudder."

"Yet you must have heard a good deal of that sort of thing in Liverpool, mademoiselle. The people about there are a very rough lot, are they not?"

"I don't think so—not worse than others,

I mean. Papa had a sad case happen once in his warehouse, though——"

"Yes, yes," said Leona, eagerly. She fully believed she was going to hear the story now.

"A very dreadful case. A poor woman killed her baby, and hid the body under some empty casks that were packed away there. But that is all I know. They will not let me hear of such things, as I said before."

"I have heard, mademoiselle—that is, I read in an old newspaper—oh, years and years ago—of another that took place also, if I remember rightly, on your father's premises."

"Did you?" said Lucilla, with wide-open eyes. "How was that?"

"It was the murder of a man, I believe, and the murderer was never traced."

"How strange! I never heard of it. It may have been some other firm, not papa's."

"No. I am sure it was the house of Messrs. Evans and Troubridge."

"Oh, Mr. Troubridge died in a fit. Perhaps you are thinking of that, Don Valera?"

"No. This was the murder of a clerk of the name of Anson, which happened about two-and-twenty years ago. Has no one ever mentioned it to you?"

"Never. I fancy you must be mistaken. Only I was not much more than a baby at that time. I am just five-and-twenty. It is strange you should imagine it happened in that year, though."

"Why?"

"Because it is just two-and-twenty years since papa and mamma sent me away from Liverpool, to be brought up down in the country."

"Why did they send you away, mademoiselle?"

"I was a sickly little thing, I believe, and country air was recommended to me. I was brought up in Sussex, by a Mrs. Gibson. I

never knew I had a father or a mother till I was nearly eight years old; and then they came down to Sussex one day and took me home to Liverpool. I remember I was *so* astonished. They seemed quite like strangers to me. But they were so kind. I was soon as happy as I could be. But it *was* funny—wasn't it?"

"*You never saw Mr. and Mrs. Evans till you were eight years old?*" said Leona, musingly.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE SCENT.

"NEVER *saw your parents till you were eight years old?*" repeated Leona, in a tone of surprise.

"Oh! I had seen them before, I suppose, Don Valera, but that was the first occasion I can remember doing so."

"And you are their only child, too!"

"And a good thing for them, if the others would have been half the trouble that I have been. But mamma did have another child—a little boy, who died soon after he was born. She has often told me of him. I am sorry I was not a boy too, for papa's sake."

"I am sure he would rather have you as ou are, mademoiselle."

"Do you think so? Anyway it is of no se wishing things to be different from what hey are. You went to see the marquise yester- ay, Don, did you not?"

"I had that honour, by madame's special ıvitation."

"And who did you meet there?"

"Sir Sydney Marchant, Miss Forrester, nd three gentlemen whose names I do not emember."

"No other ladies?"

"None except Miss Forrester, and—— I ıean except Miss Forrester."

"You are keeping something from me, Don 'alera. Why should I not know of all the ɔmpany, then?"

"I assure you I have told you all!"

"No beautiful young lady, with melting ɣes and golden hair, to take you captive?"

"Had there been such, she could have had no influence on me, mademoiselle."

"Why? Is your heart already gone?"

Leona gave a sudden sigh.

"I think it is. At all events I have not left it at Madame de Toutlemonde's."

"Ah, Don! I am afraid you are no better than the rest of your sex. But it is strange (is it not?) that there should be no ladies present at the luncheon but the hostess and Miss Forrester?"

"I did not think it strange. I have seen a great deal of the world, mademoiselle, and I should not care—I mean if I were a woman—I should not care to make a friend of the Marquise de Toutlemonde."

"You don't like her," said Lucilla, with an air of content.

"I do not, indeed! But I say it to you in strict confidence. I have no right to abuse the lady's hospitality."

"I am very glad you don't like her," observed Lucilla, "because *I* don't either."

"Had not your father an elder brother once?" asked Leona, harking back to the old subject.

"Oh yes!" said her companion readily, "his brother George—but he died long ago. There is a miniature of him in the study, but papa always keeps it locked up in one of the drawers of his writing-table. I saw it once, and asked who it was. Then he told me."

"He was very fond of him, perhaps?"

"I think he must have been. I know mamma said I mustn't mention his name again to papa, because it upset him. But it all happened long before I was born. Raymond has sometimes spoken of him to me. Have you observed that old woman who always accompanies me to the carriage with my shawls and wraps? She is Raymond. She was papa's nurse, and has lived in the family

more than forty years. I found her crying one day, poor old thing! and when I asked her the reason, she said it was her bonnie Master George's birthday, and it made her sad to think of him. I thought it very nice and affectionate of her. Don't you?"

"Very nice," repeated Leona, mechanically. She had already made up her mind, if possible, to get on the right side of Nurse Raymond.

They arrived at home to find the luncheon-room and table filled by a set of visitors, not one of whom had received an invitation to attend the meal. But, thanks to Miss Forrester and a few such enterprising spirits that had now become the rule in the Evans' household, people dropped in and out just as they chose, at all hours of the day; and the poor dear hostess thought it very convenient that they should do so, without giving her the trouble to ask them, and remained perfectly innocent of the fact that she was being "fleeced" without

mercy, and that her splendid mansion had been turned into a mere house of call for the lunchless and the tired.

Foremost amongst the self-invited guests that day were two old maiden sisters of the name of Lillietrip, who lived chiefly upon such chance visits to their friends, and knew the exact breakfast, luncheon, and dinner hour of all their acquaintances. They were gushing, enthusiastic, youthful creatures, of about sixty years of age, withered and skinny to a degree, but still young! oh so young! in their thoughts, manners, and mode of expression, and used to take huge fancies to strangers at first sight, which they discarded as soon as they found the new-made friends attracted more attention than they did themselves. They lived together in a suite of rooms where they allured visitors, especially young men, on the pretence of attending fancy-dress balls, private theatricals, and musical parties, but

which visitors, finding by experience that the chief part of such entertainments consisted in seeing and hearing the Misses Lillietrip act, dance, and sing, were accustomed to fight shy of lending their countenance to the proceedings; or if they went, were bold enough to cause not a little amusement for themselves whilst there. This last alternative, however, was always highly resented by the Misses Lillietrip, especially if the offender happened to be a female, younger and better-looking than themselves, and fortunate enough to have induced some of the gentlemen present to be amused at the same time. They would speak sharply of her as "bold" and "forward" and "designing," and even hint (but strictly behind her back) that her reputation was not wholly above reproach. They had been much troubled with one or two such recreants lately, and been obliged to give out in consequence (but also strictly behind their backs), that

they had been forced to "weed" their little society, and were determined in future to receive none but such as cared for them for themselves alone. Miss Forrester and Madame de Toutlemonde had been heard to observe that in that case the Misses Lillietrip would have very few flowers left in the garden of their acquaintance, but of this the sisters were of course blissfully ignorant. The two ladies above mentioned were not amongst the "weeded," chiefly, it was supposed, because Miss Forrester had a very sharp tongue, and an utter contempt for the feelings of her friends, and that it was her royal will and pleasure, for reasons best known to herself, that the Marquise de Toutlemonde should accompany her wherever she went. I say *for reasons best known to herself*, but that does not preclude the public from guessing at them.

And Madame de Toutlemonde gave nice little dinners in her cosy house in Bayswater,

and generally had a brougham at her command, and orders for the opera and other places of amusement. Moreover, she paid well to secure the fidelity of her few female adherents. And Miss Forrester was needy and dependent —too poor to go into society—often in want of a dinner, and a thorough time-server. She could not brave the world's opinion, but she ignored what passed beneath her eyes—in consideration of her scanty purse. She was also at the Evans' luncheon-table that day, with, of course, the marquise.

The Misses Lillietrip flew at Lucilla as she entered the room, as if they had been her oldest and dearest friends. They cajoled, they condoled, they flattered, and fawned, and caressed, like two aged and attenuated pussy-cats, giving vent to their delight or their sorrow, by little juvenile screams and infantile groans. They kept their eyes meantime, though, upon the young Spaniard, of whom they had already

heard. They liked his appearance. He looked young and soft and impressionable, and as if he would be easily taken in. And it was generally very young men whom these ancient sirens managed to allure to their home in Portman Square. Their fishing, if successful, usually resulted in the capture of some infinitesimal minnow or undeveloped tadpole. And to secure a real Spanish don for one of their receptions would be delightful. They had talked of it coming along. They had even improvised a party for his especial benefit. And they lost no time in bringing the subject forward.

"My dear Lucilla," they exclaimed (the Misses Lillietrip always talked together, and interrupted each other, so that it was difficult to know which was the speaker), "we have come here on purpose to-day to ask your dear mamma if you would all come to a little gathering at our house on Saturday; just a few

charades, you know, and a little dancing and so forth; your mamma and papa, and yourself and any friends, of course, you may have staying with you—this gentleman for instance (glancing towards Leona)—if he will honour us. You've not introduced me, my dear."

"I beg your pardon. Don Christobal Valera, Miss Lillietrip—Miss Charlotte Lillietrip."

"Delighted, I'm sure, Don Valera. Well, as I was saying, it will give us the greatest pleasure to see you all on Saturday, but your dear mamma won't say yes till she hears what you think about it."

"So good of Mrs. Evans, so like her, so kind," answered Miss Charlotte.

"Mamma is afraid of my back. I cannot stand any fatigue," said Lucilla, wearily.

"And you are tired now. You must sit down," said Leona, fetching her a chair.

She smiled her thanks for the attention before she proceeded with her conversation.

"But if mamma and papa are going, and—and—all of us, I think I should like to accompany them, though, of course, I can't dance, you know."

"My dearest girl, you shall do just as you like. We hope to have some charades, and they will amuse you."

"Shall *you* go?" asked Lucilla, timidly, of Leona.

"That is as you wish, mademoiselle," she replied, with a pretty foreign accent, over which the Misses Lillietrip went into dumb raptures.

"*I'm* going," exclaimed Lizzie Vereker, and I shall act too. What charades do you propose to have, Miss Lillietrip?" The sisters were not overpleased at this generous announcement, Miss Vereker being one of the ladies they would fain have "weeded" from their society, had she not been so intimate with the Evans. She was too handsome and

attractive and outspoken to permit them to be comfortable in her presence.

"We have not decided yet, Miss Vereker, and we must get our gentlemen first. Will your friend act?" continued Miss Lillietrip, turning to Lucilla, and indicating Leona.

"I don't know if he can. Have you ever acted charades, Don Valera?"

"Sometimes, mademoiselle."

"Will you do so, to oblige these ladies?"

"If *you* are to be there to see me, I will."

A thought had flashed into Leona's ready brain at the idea. It might prove feasible or not, but at any rate it would be as well to secure the opportunity. It was this that made her agree so readily to Lucilla's proposition.

"If you act, I shall make a point of going," rejoined Miss Evans.

The Misses Lillietrip were delighted. They invited all present for Saturday evening, and they secured Don Valera to visit them the day

before, and make the necessary arrangements for the successful production of the charades. They were gushingly enthusiastic over him, until Leona had the utmost difficulty to be civil to them. As soon as ever she could slip away from them she did. Lucilla went to lie down after luncheon, and Leona escaped to her own room, to think over the puzzling intelligence she had heard that morning, and to try if she could make it bear in any way on the mystery she was bent upon unravelling.

She took out a private memorandum-book, in which she kept a record, in Spanish, of any evidence she considered worth preserving, and wrote down :

"*Lucilla Evans was sent away from Liverpool into the country, to the care of a Mrs. Gibson, two-and-twenty years ago, when she was three years old, and does not remember to have seen her parents till she was eight.*"

"That is a very remarkable circumstance," thought Leona, as she closed her book. "In the first place, I have heard nothing of Henry Evans being married at the time the murder was committed, whereas this child appears to have been three years old, when the father could not have been much more than one-and-twenty. That seems improbable. And why should he and his wife have parted with her for five years afterwards, and never visited her —nor had her home—during all that period? Did they quit England after my poor father quitted it? I must find that out. I must find out, too, what part of Sussex Mrs. Gibson lived in, and see if it is not possible to have an interview with her. I wonder how much or how little she knows. I might go to her as the child's old nurse—as Raymond, for instance, if she has never met Raymond. *Caramba!* That reminds me of how useful the nurse herself might be. How am I to get over her? She

i very much attached to Lucilla. I will begin y praising that young lady."

It was not long before the opportunity he wished for occurred. The voice of Mrs. Raymond, who occupied the position of half-ousekeeper, half-lady's-maid, in the establish-ient, was heard in the corridor, bringing an lle servant to book, for leaning out of the indow instead of attending to her work.

"How often am I to tell you the same ling, you impudent hussy; you think of othing, morning, noon, or night, but smirk-ig at the men."

"I wasn't smirking at no men," returned ie girl.

"Well, if you wasn't, it's only because iere was no men to smirk at. Come, you be f, do, and carry all them things downstairs. his is no time of day to have the passages ttered up with mops and pails of water."

"Mrs. Raymond," said Leona, as the

housekeeper's dress rustled past the open door.

"Did you speak, sir?" was the woman's answer, given in the most dulcet of tones, as she appeared upon the threshold.

For all the females in the house, from high to low, were taken with the appearance of the young foreigner. They thought him so very handsome and nice spoken.

And, indeed, Leona, in the fashionably-cut clothes which she had been careful to procure, did make a very beautiful boy.

"Forgive me for troubling you, Mrs. Raymond, but if you would take pity on the ignorance of a poor stranger, I should be so much obliged to you. What am I to do with the linen, the shirts, the collars, you understand me, that I wish to have washed?"

"Dear me, sir, don't think twice about it. I will look after all that for you. If you will only be so good as to throw them on one side,

I will see they are properly got up and replaced in your wardrobe."

"But it will trouble you too much, I fear."

"No, indeed, sir. And I am quite sure you've not been used to look after such things yourself."

"*Madre di Dios!* madame, no! Nor yet to have such women as yourself to do it for me. In the country from which I come we have only blacks to wait upon us."

"Lawk a mercy, sir, and how ladies and gentlemen could ever abide them black creatures, I can't think. The mere thought of them makes me creep. I should never fancy anything they touched again."

"We are obliged to bear them, Mrs. Raymond, we have no other attendants. And I do not think, if we had, that we could allow women like yourself to be our servants."

At this speech Mrs. Raymond bridled. She was a fine upright old woman of perhaps

five-and-sixty, and still bore the traces of having been a handsome girl.

"Well, I'm sure, sir, and what else are we good for I wonder?"

"Mademoiselle Lucilla, I fancy, thinks you good enough for anything. She was talking to me of you this morning."

"Ah, bless her sweet heart!" said the housekeeper; "she's too much a lady to speak ill of anyone. She's a real angel is Miss Lucilla."

"So *I* think, Mrs. Raymond. But she has reason to love you. You were her father's nurse, were you not?"

"Aye, that I was, sir. I was taken into the Lime House Nursery before ever Master Henry was born, and I stayed there till after he had lost both his pa and his ma, and was breeched and sent to school, and then I went as housemaid to his uncle, Mr. Theophilus Evans, with whom the young gentle-

men lived, and when Mr. Henry married, he brought me home to his house, and so you may say I've been with them through sorrow and joy for five-and-forty years. And that's a long time for one family's service, sir."

"It is indeed! No wonder they speak of you as a friend more than a servant. But you spoke of the young *gentlemen.* Has Mr. Evans a brother?"

"He *had,* sir," she replied, with sudden gravity.

"Is he dead?"

"We believe so, sir. He went to foreign parts, and hasn't been heard of since."

"How very strange! Was he a sailor?"

"No, sir."

"A soldier?"

"No, sir. He was nothing but a gentleman. But *such* a gentleman! I've heard Master Henry called good-looking, but he's nothing to what Master George was."

"Oh, his name was George, was it?"

"Yes, sir, it was; but it quite slipped out of my mouth, and I hope you won't mention it again, for the master doesn't like his brother alluded to. It was a sad business for the family, and least said is soonest mended."

"Was Master George very wild then?"

"He was wild, sir, God bless his heart, though there wasn't a soul but loved him through it all. And, for my part, I shall never forget him—never! I don't know what set me off talking of him so, I'm sure," she continued, drying her eyes, "unless it is that you remind me of him, sir."

"I remind you of him!" cried Leona, startled.

"You do indeed, sir; though it seems strange to say so, and I can't tell you in what. But several times when I've carried Miss Lucy's shawl down to the carriage, and you've been sitting by her side, I've stood and looked at

your face—(you'll forgive the liberty, I hope, sir)—and wondered how it was you brought poor Master George so powerfully to my mind. 'Tisn't your eyes, for his was the beautifulest brown; nor yet your nose. I fancy it must be something in your smile, and the colour of your hair. Master George had just your coloured hair, sir; and I think Master Henry sees it too, for I often catch him looking at you when your head's turned another way."

"A strange fancy," laughed the young foreigner, rather uneasily. "How comes it that Mademoiselle Lucilla is so unlike both her parents, Mrs. Raymond?" he said suddenly a moment afterwards.

The housekeeper's face betrayed her disquietude at the unexpected question.

"Don't you consider her like them, sir?" she said, rather evasively.

"Certainly not. No one could. I should

never have taken her for their daughter if I had not been told so."

"She is a dear, good young lady as ever breathed," rejoined Raymond. "But I must be going—I have business below. I won't forget about your things, sir; and if there is anything else that I can do I hope you won't scruple to ask me."

"Don't go so soon. I want to talk about Mademoiselle Lucilla. Has she been long ill?"

"Ever since she was fifteen. And that's ten years ago, sir."

"How very young Mr. Evans must have married."

"Many gentlemen marry young; though I don't hold by it," replied the housekeeper, getting flurried.

"Was he married when his brother died, or went away, Mrs. Raymond?"

"Lor! sir, I don't know why you should put these questions to me at all. They can't

concern you to know. There's Miss Lucy, as handsome a young lady as you'd wish to see, and there's her pa and ma. If you want to know more than I can tell you, you'd better go straight to them."

"I'm sorry I offended you, madame. It was quite unintentional. But Mademoiselle Lucilla has been good enough to honour me with her friendship. Is it not natural I should be interested to learn all I can concerning her?"

"I beg your pardon, sir. Perhaps I spoke too hasty. But the thought of those times always cuts me up. I was very partial to Master George, sir."

"I am not surprised to hear it, madame, if he was all you say. But perhaps you will meet him again some day. He may not be dead. He may be still living in those foreign lands."

"Oh no, sir, there's no hope of that; for it's so long ago, we should have heard news

of him before now if he had been alive, poor dear. But there, it's no use talking. If he were alive he'd never come home again. I know that for one."

"Did he quarrel with his friends then?"

"Yes, sir, he did; and now I hope you'll ask me nothing more, for I can't tell you."

"I have had a purpose in asking, Mrs. Raymond. I have been a great traveller, and am likely to travel still more. Were I to meet the gentleman we have been speaking of, I might recognise him from your description."

"He wouldn't thank you to recognise him, I fancy, sir. He knows where he has got friends if he wants them."

"I have met all sorts of people in my wanderings, and have heard all sorts of secrets. You say I put you in mind of Mr. Evans' brother. I'll tell you of whom your young lady puts me in mind, Mrs. Raymond."

"I never think Miss Lucy's like anyone but herself."

"Oh, I don't mean to say they're quite alike, only there's a strong resemblance. Did you ever come across a family of the name of *Anson?*"

"*Anson,* sir?" the housekeeper repeated in a gasping voice; then, feeling she had partly betrayed herself, she added very slowly, "I've heard the name, sir, it's a common one in this country."

"I knew some people of that name once," said Leona, deliberately, and keeping her eyes fixed upon Mrs. Raymond. "And your Mademoiselle Lucilla so resembles them in feature and general style, that before I heard she was Mrs. Evans' daughter I was just going to ask if her name was not *Anson.*"

"Oh no, sir! indeed it isn't her name," exclaimed the housekeeper, with most unnecessary vehemence. "Her name's Miss Lucy Evans,

sir. You mustn't go talking about of her looking as if she had another name, sir, because the master will be very much annoyed if you do; and if it were to come back to me, sir, and to your having talked with me about it, I don't know what mightn't happen. I don't indeed,"

"Be quieted, my good madame; be calm," said Leona. "Not a word shall pass my lips of what you have said to me to-day."

"I oughtn't to have said as much as I have, I daresay," whimpered Mrs. Raymond; "but you drew it out of me somehow before I knew where I was; and you remind me so strong-like of poor Master George that I hardly seem to remember a word that's gone from me."

"And no more do I. And if I did 'tis as safe as the grave," said Leona, as she watched the housekeeper leave the room.

* * * * *

"At the same time, my good madame,"

she said to herself, "your chattering has told me all I want for the present to know. I suspected it this morning. I am sure of it now. '*Lucilla is not my uncle's daughter!*' That is the first fact! Whose is she then? Abraham Anson thanks my dear father in the postscript to his letter for his kindness to '*Little Lucy!*' If—as I almost believe—this girl is the offspring of the murdered clerk, there arises a second question to be answered:

"*Why did my uncle adopt her, and pass her off as his own child?*

"I cannot see my way clear before me yet, but I am on the scent."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSES LILLIETRIP.

HER conversation with the housekeeper cost Leona several sleepless nights and speculative days. She had arrived at that scene in the life drama she had sworn to play out by herself, when half the actors were upon the stage, and the plot was commencing to unfold itself; and yet the chattering and commotion about her were so great she could neither hear nor understand the meaning of what passed before her. Her thoughts were in inextricable confusion, and from day to day she could not decide what steps to take next. One fact was very apparent—that Mr. Evans' interest was awakened in her. Not only did he show it in the way Mrs. Raymond had pointed out—by gazing

earnestly at the young Spaniard, whenever he imagined he was unobserved—as though he was trying to discover what it was in Leona that attracted him, or to connect his fancy with some link of the past—but he attempted to prove it by more substantial methods. He appeared almost jealous of the partiality which Leona evinced for Lucilla, and seized every opportunity of securing her company for himself. He used to ask her to join him in his morning walks, when he would draw out from her, as much as possible, the history of her past life—where she had been reared, how educated, and of whom her family consisted. These questions Leona would parry to the best of her ability; and such as she was compelled to answer, she did as though she were indeed the person she represented herself to be. Then her host would take her with him into the City, and introduce her to the various members of the firm, by whom she was at first received (as

she had been by Mrs. Evans' guests) with shrugs of the shoulders and looks of incredulity. But, being presented to the gentleman who conducted the Spanish correspondence of the great house, and proving herself a proficient in reading, writing, and speaking that language in all its ramifications and branches, she rose immensely in the estimation of her companions, and ceased to be mentioned with expressions of contempt. Did no pang of remorse assail Leona Lacoste at this period, for the deception she had practised on those who had received her with such unmitigated kindness and perfect trust?

Not the slightest!

She had but one object in view. She looked upon her mission as sacred, and considered nothing underhand or dishonourable that was necessary to forward the project she had pledged herself before high heaven to carry out—the clearance of her dead father's

reputation from obloquy and reproach. She never stopped to consider if she had any right to accept the benefits showered on her in another name. Her eyes were steadfastly fixed upon one point, and she would have gone through fire and water to attain it. She had taken a cordial distaste to Mr. Evans, which no kindness on his part could mitigate. She disliked his company, she revolted at the interest he evinced for her, she shrank inwardly from the touch of his hand, or the sound of his voice. She regarded the luxury with which he and his family were surrounded as the price of her father's blood. She saw them revelling in everything they could desire, without a thought, apparently, of him who had forfeited his share of the good things of this life, to go forth and die an exile in the wilderness, branded with the infamy of a crime of which he was completely innocent, and which yet must have been committed by——whom ? For the sake of the

task before her she was obliged to submit to her uncle's peculiarities, and pertinent inquiries, and fellowship; for in intimacy with him and his alone lay her chances of discovering the truth, but the submission galled her spirit. And when it came to his offering her pecuniary benefits, her pride drew the line and became actively rebellious. And yet Mr. Evans proffered this assistance in the most delicate and generous manner. He took occasion, one afternoon, whilst Leona sat with him in his study translating an English letter into Spanish, to intimate that it might be another fortnight or three weeks before the firm would require his services professionally. "Meanwhile," continued Mr. Evans, "I trust that you are enjoying your stay in London, and making the best use of your time."

"I am enjoying it more than I could have hoped for, monsieur, thanks to the hospitality of yourself and madame."

"Our metropolis cannot compare in point of gaiety and sunshine with one of your beautiful southern cities; but still there is very much of interest in it, especially to a foreigner; and I should not like you to quit London again without having seen all that there is to see here."

"You are very good," replied Leona, "and I think madame concurs with your wishes, for she takes me almost every day to some new place."

"That is not quite what I mean. There are many things and places to be seen in town that ladies cannot go to. But sight-seeing costs money, as I have often been made to feel. And money runs away faster than we can ever make it. I do not know what arrangements Messrs. Halliday and Upjohn have made with you, Valera, but I am detaining you longer in England than they probably anticipated, and for my own pleasure or convenience.

Under these circumstances I feel bound (and I hope you will see it in the same light) to charge myself with your extra expenses. I think you will find sufficient ammunition there," he continued, passing a sealed envelope across the table, "to carry on the war a little longer, and the only favour I ask of you is that when it is expended you will be sure to let me know."

But the Spanish correspondent pushed back the sealed packet, with an expression of wounded pride and sensibility which Mr. Evans had never seen on the face of any salaried clerk before.

"I thank you, monsieur," said Leona, in a voice that slightly trembled, "for your intentions on my behalf, but I never accept money that I have not earned."

"Let us consider that you have earned it then, my dear fellow, by your attentions to my wife and my daughter. I do not know

when Lucilla has found a companion before in whom she expressed so much interest."

"I am indebted to madame and mademoiselle for their good opinion of me, which I feel to be entirely undeserved, but that cannot alter this matter between us. I have sufficient money for myself, monsieur."

"Very good," said Mr. Evans, as he threw the rejected gift into a drawer, but he seemed vexed and disappointed as he did so. "We will let the subject drop. You must believe, however, I had no intention of offending you, Don Valera."

"Oh no, monsieur, indeed, and I feel your goodness very much—but—but—it is impossible to me, that is all."

"I am, at all events, glad to know that you have no occasion to lay yourself under such an obligation to any one. It is not every young man in your position that can say the same."

"I am fortunate," said Leona, simply, as with burning cheeks she reapplied herself to her task of translation.

Presently a servant entered with a summons on business that Mr. Evans felt must be immediately attended to. He rose with a gesture of annoyance.

"It appears as though I could never get half an hour to myself. If you wish to proceed with that translation, Valera, you will find the rest of the document in that drawer; but there is no hurry, there are my keys. Lock the writing-table before you leave the room, there's a good fellow, and keep the keys till we meet again. I shall be back to dinner."

And in another minute he had gone, and Leona was left alone.

Here was her opportunity. Ever since Lucilla had spoken to her of that miniature of her uncle George which her father kept under lock and key in one of his study

drawers, Leona had longed to rifle the writing-table and see the portrait for herself. For, supposing (and the thought had occasionally flashed across her mind) it should be all a mistake; and that George Evans, with whom she had been led to associate her father's identity, should prove *not* to be the George Evans of the firm to which she had, under false pretences, attached herself! It had been all hearsay hitherto. She had received no conclusive evidence. But a sight of the miniature, should she find it to have been taken from the face she knew and remembered so well, would settle her doubts at once. She waited breathlessly with the keys in her hand till she heard the hall-door close after Mr. Evans; then, hurriedly securing herself against intrusion, she commenced her search. Drawer after drawer was ransacked of its contents before she came to what she looked for. Private letters, professional papers, receipts of

consequence and bills of value, passed in revision before her, but she never stopped even to glance at them. With all her anxiety to clear her father's name, and her determination to let no obstacle stand in the way of her filial duty, Leona Lacoste would have scorned to have read a private letter without permission, as she scorned to accept money from the man whom she believed she was working in the dark to ruin. There *are* women who consider it no dishonour to be dishonourable—unfortunately there are many—but the instinct of all noble natures is the same ; and the nature, educated or otherwise, who will stoop to listen at a door or read a letter not intended for its perusal, never mind to attain what end, will never rise under any circumstances to be noble. It may be restrained through fear, or propriety, or shame, but if it be not instinctively too grand to grovel, its uprightness will be at the best but a sham.

Leona Lacoste had been born noble. Her fiery untamed nature was full of faults; and to attain a purpose which appeared of more consequence to her than the rest of the world put together, she could act a part which she believed would injure no one but the guilty. But her host's private papers were safe with her. She passed them over with no more notice than was necessary to let her see the portrait she looked for was not amongst them. But at last she came upon it. At last, in the lowest drawer, hidden beneath a store of unused writing-paper, she spied a small oval red morocco case, much worn and discoloured, which, on being opened, disclosed the features of her father. She could not mistake them. Young, *débonnair*, and handsome, as George Evans had appeared at one-and-twenty, with his laughing eyes and winning smile, his daughter could yet trace the expression that had become overshadowed by trouble and fear before

she knew it, and recognise the thick curls of chestnut hair that had whitened from the same cause. She had hardly thought the sight of him as he had been would so much affect her; but the tears gathered thickly in her eyes as she gazed at the miniature, and compared it with the wreck that he had died. As she looked at him through the blinding mist her emotion had evoked, it seemed as though he called out to her from the past to see what the injustice of public opinion had done for him, and to be steadfast to avenge his wrongs. She examined the portrait minutely, and taking in every detail of form and colouring, was struck with its startling likeness to herself at the present time, rendered all the more striking by her assumed attire. She no longer wondered that Mr. Evans should regard her with attention, or that the housekeeper should say she reminded her of "poor Master George." She was only surprised that they could live in the

same house with her and not discover who she was. But she forgot that the lapse of years since George Evans disappeared, and their total ignorance, even of the country to which he had escaped, rendered it unlikely that her appearance would have the power to do more than raise his memory.

She recalled the vivid past to Mr. Evans; the past that he had been vainly trying all these long years to forget—that he would fain have thrust from him as the enemy of an evil dream, and that was all. And yet, for the very sake of what that past had caused him to suffer, he would have been kind to the young stranger if she would have permitted him. But he made her suffer too. Had she followed her inclination she would have run away and never looked upon his face again—that face so like, and yet so unlike her dear injured father's handsome features.

But she had her part to play, and having

well once put her shoulder to the plough, was not the woman to turn back until the harrowing was completed, never mind whose back suffered in the fulfilment of her duty.

She replaced the miniature where she had found it, and locked the drawers. She could not proceed with the task of translation; when the brain is fermenting with a new project, or excited over a strange discovery, our natural powers go from us. So Leona closed her study door behind her and sought the presence of Lucilla Evans, whose dull eyes lighted up with pleasure as she perceived her friend cross the threshold of the drawing-room.

* * * * *

The Misses Lillietrip had secured the attendance of Don Christobal Valera the day before they were to give their charade-party, in order to hold a consultation as to the

scenes they intended to represent. He was punctual to his appointment, and found Miss Vereker already installed in office, with some five or six other ladies and gentlemen who had promised to take part in the performance. The Misses Lillietrip were in great form. They always were on the eve of private theatricals or charades, and they invariably insisted upon playing the young and lovely heroines themselves, and thus came in for the largest share of the spurious spooning that necessarily went on. And to those ladies who have never had any experience of the genuine article, the theatrical substitute seems to afford somewhat of satisfaction. There is no accounting for taste. When Leona was first made to understand that whatever was acted the Misses Lillietrip intended to adopt the *rôles* of heroines, she was at a loss to comprehend how they could ever suppose they would look the parts. But then,

she was not aware that they possessed two beautiful flaxen wigs in their boxes upstairs, and that, according to female reasoning, flaxen curls and a liberal amount of rouge will cover a multitude of crow's-feet and wrinkles. As a matter of fact, the fairer the hair the older appears the skin: and a complexion that might pass muster under a dark brown wig, looks coarse and ruddled beneath locks of gold—but let that pass. To quote an old saw, "Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise;" and certainly the Misses Lillietrip had no intention of being wise on this occasion, nor any fear apparently of placing their withered arms and cheeks in close proximity with Don Valera's blooming complexion and smooth, plump hands. A few of the preliminaries having been arranged, Miss Charlotte Lillietrip (who considered herself quite an infant by the side of her elder sister) took it into her virginal head that the young

Spaniard must require some instruction in the mode of English love-making, and proceeded therefore to show him a few of her favourite *poses*, and initiate him into the manner in which she desired he should receive her arch smiles and languishing glances; whilst Lizzie Vereker, who would have had no objection herself to play lady-love to the pretty boy whom she had bantered so unmercifully and unsuccessfully during the last few days, as to make her almost inclined to give him up as a fool, sat enthroned in an arm-chair, and laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks; and Miss Charlotte, anything but pleased at the ridicule thrown on her acting, remarked snappishly, that if Miss Vereker could do it better she would prefer, perhaps, to take the principal part herself, and leave her hostesses to play waiting-maids and old women.

"*Of course* I should prefer it, infinitely,"

replied the audacious Lizzie, no way daunted by Miss Charlotte's sneer; "and I think I should *look* the part quite as well as you will, into the bargain. But you are not going to keep Don Valera the *whole* evening to yourself, are you? You'll let me come in for a share of the kissing, I hope. Consider my feelings."

Leona laughed at this speech heartily—knowing what she knew, and the Misses Lillietrip looked proportionately disgusted.

"You make me feel quite nervous, positively," said the guileless Charlotte, with a look of modest alarm. "I shall never be able to act if you speak in that way. It is only by regarding such things entirely from a business-like point of view that one is able to go through with them. Don Valera must understand what I mean; I am sure he is too much of a gentleman to misinterpret."

But at this juncture Lizzie's shrieks might

be heard all over the house, and Leona was scarcely less amused.

"Indeed! you must believe me, mademoiselle," she commenced, "that I never had a thought—a notion——"

"A wish, a desire, a craving," cried Lizzie Vereker, "for unhallowed pleasures. Of course he hadn't. Why, Miss Lillietrip, Don Valera is the most moral of men—I can assure you of that on my own authority, for I've been trying to make love to him ever since he came to Hyde Park Gardens, and he won't have anything to say to me!"

"This is absurd! This is turning the whole thing into a farce," exclaimed Miss Lillietrip, with as much offence as if they had met for the most solemn of purposes. "If this is to go on we had better break up the meeting at once, and not have any party or charades at all."

But this was carrying the joke too far.

"No, no! mademoiselle," cried Leona, who had a purpose in wishing to act with them. "I, for one, cannot consent to such a terrible disappointment. And after you have promised, too, to let me play your lover. Let me at least have that pleasure," she continued in a low voice, "*if it be for one evening only.*" And the request and the whisper combined proved too fascinating. The Misses Lillietrip consented to be appeased, and the party gathered amicably round the table, to discuss what words they would select for acting. Several were suggested, and rejected or accepted, as they were considered suitable or not. At last some one proposed "Outcast," and was negatived by general agreement.

"The word is too commonplace — too short," remarked Miss Vereker; "besides, how could we act it?"

"Look for another," said Miss Lillietrip to the gentleman who held the dictionary.

"Outcast—Outcast," mused Leona, and then, after a moment, "might I suggest that we reconsider that last word?" she asked.

Anything that Don Valera proposed was agreeable to the Misses Lillietrip, who immediately discovered that "Outcast" would make a first-rate charade.

"I think we might have a worse," said Leona. "I see a little romance to be woven from that word."

"Oh, that is charming!—so original!" said Miss Charlotte, as she pushed her chair close to Leona's. "Do tell it to us, Don."

"Let us imagine then for the first syllable, 'out,' that there are two brothers, one of whom is unjustly accused of a crime of which the other is really guilty, and that the innocent man permits himself to be turned out of doors by his father sooner than lay the blame where it is due. We might work up this scene into something very telling, I think.

There would be the parting from the girl he loves," added Leona, turning to Miss Charlotte, "who never really believes that he is guilty."

"*Of course not!* What woman who really loved would?" exclaimed the romantic young thing, with upturned eyes.

"Do go on—this is interesting," said Lizzie.

"*Marvellously* clever," chimed in Miss Lillietrip.

"Then for 'cast.' One might portray the injured man, cast away—either at sea or in a foreign land—and enduring great hardship from the knowledge of how they had misjudged him at home, and that he might never have an opportunity of retrieving his character in their eyes. Here I think," went on Leona, turning to the elder Miss Lillietrip, "he might encounter a temptation to be faithless to his betrothed from the love of another beautiful woman, whose lot shall be cast in with his own. And that part would do for you."

"Charming! charming! A lovely idea," cried both the sisters at once.

"The scene for 'Outcast' must be at his home again, where they are mourning him as dead, and where, believing him to be so, his guilty brother makes full confession of his crime; in the midst of which the 'Outcast' must return, brought back by the woman who loves him hopelessly, and who joins his hand with that of his betrothed. This is a very simple outline of my conception," continued Leona, "and we must talk it over, of course, and fill it in. It is an idea, that is all."

"It is excellent!—very good indeed!" was the general verdict.

"Oh! it is more than that, a great deal," said the enthusiastic sisters; "it is sensational, romantic, poetic, to a degree. You are a genius, Don Valera, a thorough genius; we can never thank you sufficiently." And,

elated with the thought of having equal opportunities of embracing the handsome young Spaniard, the Misses Lillietrip bore him off with them to the next room for secret counsel and the doubtful refreshment of stale sponge-cakes and bad sherry.

Lizzie Vereker sat in her arm-chair, kicking her heels against the floor. She didn't approve of the proposed charade. There was no part for her in it, and she set Don Valera down as a brute or a fool.

As they drove back together in the Evans' carriage—having arranged to return on the following morning for rehearsal, Leona perceived for the first time the perverse young lady's mood.

"What's the matter?" she said kindly "Have you a headache, Miss Vereker?"

"No."

"Why are you so silent, then?"

"Why should you care to know?"

"Because I like to hear you talk, as everybody else does."

"Indeed! I shouldn't have thought it."

"Now, I'm sure something *is* the matter, from your tone of voice. Have I offended you?"

"Why should you think you had?"

"Because I was afraid of it," replied Leona, as she glanced in her companion's face. She had acted a boy's part so long that she sometimes almost came to think she was one.

"Are you *really* afraid? Would you be sorry if I did not like you?" demanded Lizzie, eagerly.

"Of course I should."

"Then I *do* like you. There!"

"That's right! I am very glad to hear it," replied Leona, as she laid her hand on Miss Vereker's. She also liked the high-spirited, imprudent girl sincerely; for there was something in her independent way of thinking that accorded with her own. But

she was surprised at the vehemence with which Lizzie seized her hand and squeezed it.

"You kept no part for me in the charade," she said, with a half sob, "and so I thought you didn't want me to act with you."

"Oh my dear! what a mistake!" exclaimed Leona, falling unconsciously into her natural character. "How could you suppose for a moment I would rather act with those two ugly old women than with you? But I had a design, well (remembering herself)—I can hardly tell you *why* I did it, but it was not, at all events, because I preferred anybody to yourself."

"Then I don't care *why* it was!" replied Lizzie, as she lifted up a very bright face sc close to Leona's that it only seemed natural t my heroine to kiss it. The minute she h done it though, she saw by the blush that dy her companion's cheek, how imprudent she h been, but it was impossible to explain

action away again. She must let Miss Vereker think what she chose.

"Forgive me! I didn't mean to do that, mademoiselle," she said apologetically.

But Lizzie Vereker only laughed at her dismay.

"You shouldn't have done it," she said. "You are a very naughty boy, and I ought not to forgive you—at least all at once!—but there!—placing her hand in Leona's, "I suppose I must; only, don't you do it again—*till next time!*" she added, with a look that said, "next time may be at once, if you choose to make it so, Don Valera!"

But it was Leona's turn to blush now, as the truth burst on her mind—and she did it right royally!—thereby making Miss Vereker decide in her heart that "the boy was a fool after all!"

But what was this Leona was bringing on herself? She feared she would have to snub Lizzie Vereker for the future.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ACTED CHARADES.

As will be surmised, it was Leona's strong dramatic instincts that had led her to think of furthering her solution of the mystery that enveloped her father's life and death by the acting of a charade. The play-scene in Hamlet, with various other *dénouements*, formed after the same pattern, had been floating through her brain when she pressed the word "Outcast" on the consideration of the Misses Lillietrip. But the more she thought of the design the more she liked it. When in company with Lizzie Vereker—who had commenced to call the attention of the public to the secret understanding which she conceived

to exist between them, in a manner which was most embarrassing to poor Leona—she returned next day to the house of the maiden sisters, she had brought her first idea of the charade to such a state of perfection as to elicit the shrillest screams of approbation from those ladies. She laid the scene of the first syllable in Germany, and the second in Spain, thus bringing in the aid of pretty costumes to heighten the effect of the little drama. And to crown all, she appeared ready armed with the sketch of a second charade, in which Lizzie Vereker was to take the principal part, and have full opportunity of showing off her ankles and her acting.

So everybody was pleased, and Leona became feverishly anxious to watch the effect of her plan, and fearful lest, at the last moment, something might occur to prevent the attendance of those whom she most wished to be witness of her efforts. But nothing went

wrong. All the inmates of Mr. Evans' house assembled at the dinner-table on the eventful day, smiling and ready for the evening's amusement.

Lucilla looked almost pretty, in the palest of pink dresses, whilst excitement in the anticipation of an unusual pleasure had tinged her cheeks with the same colour as her robe, and Tom Hastings, who sat opposite, appeared unable to take his eyes off her for admiration of the change. Mr. Evans came in late—he usually came in late—but rubbing his hands with a satisfied expression on his face.

"Just got all my business over in time, Valera," he said, as he took his seat at table, "and very glad of it too. I should have been sorry to miss this evening. I met Miss Charlotte Lillietrip in the Park just now, and she is in ecstasies over your performance. Acting is not much in my line, private or public, but I suppose you've been used to it.

Have a great deal of that sort of thing in New York, eh ?"

"Occasionally, sir. It is a fashionable amusement there, as here."

"Ah ! brings young people together, of course. That's a fashion that will never go out I fancy. Well, and who else takes part in these famous charades. You, Tom ?" he continued, addressing Dr. Hastings.

Tom looked unutterable scorn at the idea.

"*I*, sir ? I have something better to think of, I hope, than dressing myself up in frippery, and strutting about a drawing-room for the edification of my friends. I leave that to less busy people."

Lucilla resented the innuendo sharply.

"It must be more amusing than making pills, anyway," she retorted.

"I said nothing against the *amusement* of it, Lucilla. I expect to be uncommonly amused myself, this evening."

"That is mightily condescending of you, I am sure," exclaimed Lizzie Vereker. "Perhaps you will find something to laugh at in me, since I am to be one of the dramatic corps."

"Oh you are going to act, Miss Vereker, are you?" interposed Mr. Evans. "Then I conclude a gallant captain has been at drill, too, during the last few days."

"If you're alluding to Captain Rivers, you are all wrong, Mr. Evans, for he certainly is not going to act with me to-night. He couldn't do it if he tried."

"Well, I think you might give me the benefit of the doubt, Miss Vereker," said the gentleman in question, in an aggrieved tone, "considering this is the first time the subject has been mooted."

"Oh, I see you can't act, by your face. It has always the same expression on it."

If that were the case, Captain Rivers' habitual expression must have been a very un-

pleasant one, judging from that which Miss Vereker's words called forth. But he kept his temper admirably.

"That is because you always see it when looking at yourself," he answered.

"Well, don't say it's the reflection from mine, for I shouldn't take that as a compliment, Captain Rivers."

"Your nature's not so transparent as you give yourself the credit for," he said, gloomily.

Leona perceived plainly that the men of the party were as much set against her as the women were on her side. The knowledge only made her smile. She knew she had but to change her clothes to turn the tide in a contrary direction; and the jealousy hurt her no more than the flattery pleased.

She was walking through the world with her eyes fixed upon one point only.

The dinner-hour had been advanced that day in order to accommodate the Misses Lillie-

trip's charade-party, and as soon as the meal was despatched they started for their destination. Here the usual preliminary fuss, bustle, delay, and inconvenience attendant on an amateur theatrical dressing-room went on upstairs; whilst the patient audience in the drawing-room sipped weak tea and nibbled cold tea-cakes, in order to beguile their impatience. All the pleasure, as is inevitable with such entertainments, was for the performers—all the boredom and *ennui* for the spectators. In the Misses Lillietrip's dressing-rooms the utmost excitement prevailed. One had, of course, been put aside for the gentlemen to change their clothes in; the other devoted to the use of the ladies. But from the furtive exclamations of horror, and shrieks of laughter that occasionally reached the ears of the party in the drawing-room, it was evident that some sort of collusion was taking place upstairs—that Miss Lillietrip had been surprised in her blue dressing-

gown by Don Valera on the landing, or that the fair Charlotte had been startled out of all her propriety by a knock at her door, and a hoarse voice demanding assistance in the shape of pins, or needles and thread, whilst she was in the very act of putting up her own scanty and undeniably dyed hair under the celebrated flaxen wig. Then some of the gentlemen's things didn't fit, and some of them wanted tapes tied and hooks fastened. And, to crown all, the handsome young Spaniard insisted upon "making-up" Miss Charlotte's face himself; and after having smeared her with glycerine, dusted her with powder, blacked her under her eyes, and rouged her on the eyelids, cheekbones, and lips, found he had so vastly improved her personal appearance that he actually gave her a resounding kiss, in reward for her patience and amiability. This was the climax. Miss Charlotte liked the salute amazingly—nothing better—but could

not have done anything so staid as to enjoy it quietly. She must needs give a girlish scream of mingled terror and delight, which brought all the other ladies round her to inquire the cause, and made Lizzie Vereker give Leona a look of displeasure that almost startled her.

The next minute they had assembled on the stage formed by the back drawing-room, and the curtain had risen on the first scene of the charade "Outcast."

Under Leona's practical direction the little drama had really been most creditably got up. The interior of an apartment, half kitchen, half sitting-room, in a German farm-house, was faithfully depicted. The costumes, too, with which she was well acquainted, had been followed quite closely enough for representation. There was to be seen the old German farmer, in his quaint habiliments, smoking his pipe, with his *frau* knitting stockings by his side, and the *mädchen* moving about the room,

laying the table for supper. Presently there entered to them one of their sons, pale, travel-stained, disordered. They noticed his appearance, and inquired the cause. He answered them shortly and gloomily. Whilst engaged on their supper they were surprised by the officers of justice, with an order for the arrest of their son, on the charge of murdering a certain merchant who had been found dead, and robbed of his possessions. The parents were horror-stricken. They called on their son to refute the dreadful accusation. At first he was unable to speak—then he denied it. The officers produced the articles found near the murdered man—a glove, a knife, a handkerchief—and the accused man recognised them as belonging to his brother. At this juncture it was Miss Charlotte Lillietrip's turn to act, and she made the most of her part. Leona had wished to keep her as much as possible in the background, but the flaxen wig and short

German petticoats were not to be outdone. Down in the front of the foot-lights they dropped, as with uplifted hands and streaming eyes the ancient *mädchen* attested the innocence of her betrothed. Whilst she was hard at it, Leona, dressed as a German student, entered on the scene. Her dramatic talent, added to her professional knowledge, at once impressed her spectators. They became interested—absorbed. The rest had been child's-play—*this* was earnest. When she started back on being accused of the murder, her audience could almost see her countenance blanch. When she turned her eyes in deliberate silence upon her brother, they knew that he was the guilty party. When she took the weeping *mädchen* in her arms, and bade her farewell, some of the women began to cry. And when she finally submitted to being led away by the officers, and turned at the door to gaze once more on her accuser, they all saw

and understood that the brothers had changed places, and that the younger was sacrificing himself for the elder.

At the conclusion of the scene the applause was long and loud, but it was all intended for Leona.

The second word was more difficult to represent. It is not easy to transform a modern back drawing-room into the shore of a desert isle. However, it was sufficiently successful to convey the idea of what it was meant to be. And here the wrongfully accused brother, who, although justice had not been able to convict him of a crime he never committed, had been unable to remain in his native country under the suspicion of guilt, was to be seen cast away in company with part of the crew of a Spanish vessel, in which he had been journeying to the New World. In this picture Leona had all the acting to herself, and she acted splendidly. The woman

seemed inspired. She threw herself into the part as though it had been created for her. She thought of her dead father's secret lamentations, and what he would have said had he given them vent, and her words came pouring from her mouth as though she had learned them off by heart. The student she represented spoke of his home, of all he had hoped to do, to be, and to make for himself; then of his brother's ingratitude, of his own wasted life, of the dark mystery—the knowledge of the cloud hanging over his name, of the suspicions entertained of his innocence by his family, gave him. And when he went on as solemnly to implore heaven to send some means by which the truth of his tarnished honour might be restored, and his name redeemed from a shameful and undeserved ignominy, the people sitting in the front drawing-room forgot they were only looking at a charade, of which they were expected

to guess, the meaning, and held their breath and trembled, or wept in concert with the actor, as their sympathies best inclined them. Even Dr. Hastings and Captain Rivers were obliged to confess that "the fellow knew what he was about." They forgot even to laugh at the absurd figure cut by Miss Lillietrip as the beautiful Spanish girl who drew out his sad history from the homeless wanderer. Leona's acting was so real, it shed a halo of truth upon all its surroundings, and made the spectators overlook everything but itself.

But as the curtain dropped upon the second syllable, and she gained the upper landing again, she found her fellow-actors in earnest colloquy.

"You don't mean to say he is gone?

"Why, did you not see him get up in the middle and leave the room? It created quite a commotion."

"But why?"

"Because Don Valera's acting affected him so much, I suppose. I know no other reason."

"Well, I'm sure it was enough to do it. I was nearly crying myself the whole time."

"What is it all about?" inquired Leona, as she came upon the chattering group.

"Only that you've driven Mr. Evans away. He was completely upset by the charade."

"Nonsense! How could that be?"

"I was watching him from the side all the time," said Miss Charlotte, "and I saw him fidgeting on his seat and changing colour; and then Mrs. Evans spoke to him, and he was quiet a little bit, but at last he could evidently stand it no longer, for he made a sudden jump up and rushed from the room."

"But he will return surely," said Leona.

"Indeed he will not return," cried the Marquise de Toutlemonde, who had found

her way upstairs, "for we have just heard from the servants that he took his hat and left the house. A fine sensation you have created, Don! But I don't wonder at it, for my heart has been in my mouth all the time you have been acting!"

"It was *perfection!*" exclaimed Miss Charlotte, with clasped hands.

"It is time to begin the finale," said Leona, anxious to disperse her clustering admirers; and in a few moments she found herself standing on the stairs alone.

He had actually gone then. Her uncle had fled before the memory of the past. Her *ruse* had succeeded—but how? Was it brotherly affection—the sting of an unforgotten grief, that had driven him away? or was it *the consciousness of guilt?* She had not time to fight out this question with herself at that moment; she must judge by his future conduct. Beside her was Madame de Toutlemonde

(who had already been rather offended by the seeming indifference of the young Spaniard to her charms), trying to get up a flirtation with her.

"A penny for your thoughts, Don!" she exclaimed sweetly, with her head on one side.

Now Leona had taken a great dislike to this woman, simply because she saw that she was not what she assumed to be. She could laugh at and with the old maiden sisters; she could amuse herself with teasing Lizzie Vereker; or bear with much patience the pressing attentions of Lucilla Evans; but she had a repulsion towards Madame la Marquise. She hated her soft voice and wheedling ways; she despised her painted face and modish dresses. These might be fitting traps wherewith to lure that feeble creature man, who will run after a petticoat fluttering from a broomstick; but they were too paltry to excite anything but the con-

tempt of an open-eyed and honest woman. Leona recognised in Madame la Marquise one of those improper ladies, or lady-like improprieties—which shall we call them ?—who infest society in the present age, and gain footing in many a house where the master and mistress are lavish of their hospitality, and unsuspecting of evil. The men of a family have too often their own reasons for not exposing the true character of such hybrid ladies ; and the women have no opportunity of hearing the truth, until one day some man more bold or less interested than the rest, expresses his surprise at meeting them in respectable society, or gives a private caution to the mother of the establishment ; and inquiries are set on foot and discoveries made, and the place wherein they were received as honoured guests knows them no more.

Leona, with her knowledge of the world

and general society, had read Madame de Toutlemonde's character at a glance. Had she been what she professed to be she would doubtless have enjoyed the fun of being made love to by a really pretty woman as much as anyone, but being female and honest, the instinctive shrinking of her sex from all that is polluted and impure came upon her as often as she was brought in contact with the marquise; and when she found that they were standing on the same stair she intuitively moved a step higher.

"Now, that is unkind," said Madame la Marquise. "Do you mean to pretend there is not room enough for us both on one step, Don?"

"I pretend nothing; but I am anxious not to crowd you."

"Suppose I like to be crowded—by *you*," she answered.

"Then I should say you have very bad

taste, madame. Your dress is too pretty to be crushed."

"Bah! what signifies my dress? That is but an excuse for evading my question. Tell me, Don, why is it you do not like me?"

"Who has told you that I do not?"

"Yourself. I read it in your eyes."

"I advise you not to look there, madame; they are not such easy books to interpret as you imagine."

"Let me learn how to read them, then," urged the lady, coming nearer. "Teach me, Don."

"I have not the knowledge myself, madame, neither would my eyes say anything to you."

"You are cruel—both cold and cruel. I cannot understand you. What are you made of—ice or marble? I thought your countrymen had souls of fire."

"Perhaps so—in a good cause."

"And am *I* not a good cause, you saucy boy?"

"You are a beautiful one, madame."

"Come, that's not so bad. We are getting on. I will give you a kiss for that," said the marquise, as she lifted her face to Leona. But the girl could not embrace her. She had kissed both Lizzie Vereker and Miss Charlotte Lillietrip in play, but she shrank from madame's painted lips as though they had been poisoned.

"Hush! I hear my cue," she said, pushing past her down the staircase. "It is time I joined Miss Lillietrip," and before the other could stop her she was gone.

Madame de Toutlemonde stood on the stairs, angry and confounded. Was it possible this wretched boy had actually *refused* to kiss her? She grew so heated over the idea, she was compelled to go back into the dressing-room and powder her face again. Madame de Toutlemonde was not wholly unused to rebuffs,

but they seldom came from the sex she believed Leona to be, and she was indignant at the supposed insult. As she puffed her face and arranged the curls over her forehead, she determined that she would have her revenge of him. The young upstart should learn that he could not refuse *her* favours with impunity. And when she had sufficiently cooled herself, she resumed her seat amongst the rest of the audience, and talked aloud and yawned audibly during the remainder of the evening's performance. For it is a peculiarity of ladies of the type of Madame la Marquise de Toutlemonde, that as soon as they are offended, they can be just as rude, ill-mannered, and spiteful as they were before smooth-spoken and amiable. A cat with its claws sheathed, and a cat with its claws out. That is all the difference between their good tempers and their bad.

Notwithstanding madame's temper, however, the charade "Outcast" went on to its

close. It was observed that Don Valera did not act with so much spirit in the last scene as he had done in the two first. The fact is Leona's mind was occupied with thoughts concerning the reason of her uncle's absence, and speculations as to his return.

These made her absent and inattentive to the work in hand, so that Miss Charlotte's gushing tenderness at the restoration of her lover did not meet with all the return she had anticipated, and the curtain fell rather flatly.

Leona was angry with herself afterwards for this distraction. What right had she to spoil the entertainment of her friends, to gratify her own morbid fancies? Had she not plenty of time for thought at home? Taking herself to task after this fashion, she resolved to do her best in the succeeding charade, where most of her play was to be with Miss Lizzie Vereker, and when she came on the stage, she found that that young lady was quite deter-

mined to keep her up to her work. The action was confined to modern life, but there was a great deal of love-making in it; and Lizzie, who had been debarred, greatly against her will, from taking any part in the first charade, had made up her mind that the people in front should see what *she* called "spooning" in this. She had rehearsed the character, after a fashion, the day before, but Leona had no idea she intended going so far as she did that night. Even for two women personating lovers, the action was very strong, but under the supposed circumstances of sex, it almost passed the limits of decorum. Yet, do what Leona would, she could not make the headstrong and imprudent girl lessen her familiarities or her caresses. Miss Vereker (like some other amateurs) appeared to imagine that the mere fact of "acting" dispensed with the reticence of daily life, and that she might indulge her wayward fancy without control. And the

immediate presence of Captain Rivers, in a large arm-chair, close to the foot-lights, only seemed to urge her on to wilder flights of imagination. She was at the very height of her love-making, and Leona, who, if she was not to repulse her in public, was compelled in some measure to respond to her advances, had just folded her rather warmly in her arms, when a loud scream from some one in the audience was quickly succeeded by a burst of hysterics, and amidst a general rising of the guests, the curtain was obliged to be let down, and the charade brought to an untimely conclusion.

"*Who* is it? *What* is it?" cried Lizzie Vereker, impatiently. "How annoying to be interrupted in this manner! I believe it's that booby, Lucilla Evans."

"Never mind. I'm sure they have had enough of it, and it is quite time to give over," replied Leona; who, now that the excitement

of the evening was past for her, was beginning to feel weary and depressed.

"Oh dear! oh dear! isn't it distressing?" exclaimed Miss Lillietrip, hurrying in to them. "We mustn't have any more acting to-night, for poor dear Lucilla is taken so ill—over-tired, I suppose, or over-excited. She's not used to these things, you know—and they've carried her up to my bedroom, and Dr. Hastings has gone with her. But you mustn't let it break up the evening—and I hope you'll come and have some refreshment, Don, for you must need it I am sure; and how we can ever thank you enough for all you've done and gone through to-night, I don't know." And thus talking, lamenting, and extolling, Miss Lillietrip ushered her guests into the supper-room.

Meanwhile Lucilla Evans, who had been thus unexpectedly upset by the fatigue or the heat—*or the acting*—was conveyed upstairs

by her mother and Tom Hastings, and placed upon Miss Lillietrip's bed.

She had begun by a loud shriek, then she had gone off in a sort of faint; on being revived from which she had commenced to laugh hysterically; and having been scolded into another mood, was now lying on the pillows weeping silently.

"What can I get for her?" exclaimed Mrs. Evans, in distress. "What do you recommend, Tom? Brandy and water, or sherry, or coffee? Is there anything that will do her any good?"

"Quiet, my dear Mrs. Evans, a few minutes' rest and quiet, and then take her home and put her to bed. Lucilla is not accustomed to such fatigue as she has gone through to-night. She ought never to have come here."

"I wish I never had!" said Lucilla, weeping.

"But, my dear girl——" commenced her mother.

"My dear madam," interposed Dr. Hastings, "will you go and fetch a glass of wine, and leave Lucilla alone with me. I must forbid her talking or being talked to for a few miuutes."

Good Mrs. Evans trotted off obediently to do the doctor's bidding, and as soon as the door was closed after her he turned to his patient.

"Now, Lucilla," he said, sternly, "I cannot have any more of this nonsense, or I shall speak to your father about it."

"Oh Dr. Hastings! you would not—you *could* not! You do not know——"

"I know far more than you have any idea of. But I have been watching you closely for some time past, and the absurd fancies you have got into your head are no secret to me."

"*What* absurd fancies?" inquired Lucilla, with dogged boldness.

"Don't provoke me to mention them, for they're nothing to be proud of; and I am quite sure of what steps Mr. Evans would take were the matter confided to him."

"I shall *hate* you if you speak to papa about it," said the girl.

Tom Hastings changed countenance, but he did not give in.

"Then don't let me see any more hysterics," he answered immediately.

"Is she better?" asked Mrs. Evans, re-appearing with the glass of wine.

"She is *going to be*, I trust, my dear madam," replied the doctor. "Drink this, Lucilla—that's right. And now, the best thing mamma can do is to take you home."

"Not till they *all* come," said Lucilla imploringly.

"They *will* all come, love," replied Mrs.

Evans. "It must be high time to go, and the carriage is at the door. Will you accompany us, Tom?"

"No, thank you!" rejoined the doctor, shortly, as he turned on his heel and left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

LUCILLA'S ILLNESS.

THERE was a general look of dissatisfaction on the faces of the guests left behind at the Misses Lillietrip's, as the carriage which contained Mrs. Evans, her daughter, Lizzie Vereker, and Don Christobal Valera, rolled away from the hall door.

Captain Rivers and Dr. Hastings, who were gnashing their teeth with indignation, the one at Miss Vereker's too evident admiration of the handsome Spaniard, the other at Lucilla Evans' fit of hysterics, retired to the farther end of the supper-room and indulged in a hearty and wholesome abuse of the absent foreigner. Madame de Toutlemonde, whose instincts drew her their way, had soon joined the

conclave, with her friend Miss Forrester, and all four united in denouncing the folly of the women and the impudence of the man.

"How Lizzie Vereker's father can permit his daughter to pull about a man like that in public, beats my comprehension," remarked Miss Forrester, spitefully. "I suppose the girl *has* a father, hasn't she, or some one to look after her? It was perfectly shocking to see her! What on earth would a woman be thought of who went on in that way *off* the stage?"

"Don't mention it," cried the virtuous marquise, with a shrug of indignation, "it was outrageous, indecent. I shall never speak to Miss Vereker again!"

"Well, I think you're going a little too far in saying that. I do indeed, by Jove," said Captain Rivers. "Miss Vereker never behaved in that way before she met this confounded Spaniard."

"It was every bit his fault," agreed Tom Hastings; "and if these old women" (indicating the Misses Lillietrip by a jerk of his elbow) "weren't a couple of fools they would never have asked him to act. Who wanted to see him lumbering through every scene? But I suppose the old girls are in love with him, or some such folly."

"Everybody seems to be in love with him," said Miss Forrester.

"I'm not, my dear, for one," replied her friend.

"Well, no, Fifine. I hardly meant to include you. But Miss Lucilla's hysterics look very like it. I perceived they came on at the height of the embracing between Don Valera and that forward minx, Lizzie Vereker."

"Oh, as to that I think you're mistaken," interposed Dr. Hastings, quickly. "Miss Evans is very used to attacks of the kind. She is not strong enough to come out in the even-

ing, and I have often warned her mother against hot rooms and late hours. I should be very sorry to attribute her illness to anything but the most ordinary cause. Besides, this Spanish don, as he calls himself, is almost a stranger to her."

"So he is to Miss Vereker," remarked the marquise.

"But Miss Vereker's love-making was all in the course of the charade. You don't suppose she meant anything by it?" said Captain Rivers, uneasily.

"I really don't know what to suppose, Captain Rivers. Young ladies are so exceedingly strange in their behaviour nowadays. But I cannot see, for my own part, what there is to admire in Don Valera."

"He appears nothing but a lubberly boy to me," remarked Miss Forrester, to whom Leona had always been distantly polite.

"A perfect cub," said the marquise.

"An undersized, flabby foreigner, with a complexion and hands like a woman. I believe the animal uses rouge," added Captain Rivers, contemptuously.

"With a squeaky voice, and a face as smooth as a billiard-ball. What can a girl see in such a hybrid! Why doesn't she take to hugging one of her own sex instead. But no, forsooth! He's a don, or he says so, and a Spaniard, and there's some romance attached to the idea, and so the silly creatures flutter round him as if he were that martyred hero of modern history, the Emperor Maximilian himself. I have no patience with it all," grumbled Dr. Hastings.

"What made Mr. Evans leave the company so suddenly?" inquired Miss Forrester. "I don't think he can have conceived such a partiality for this Valera as his daughter has."

"I don't know what called him away. Business perhaps, or he was sick of the per-

formance, as he well might have been," said Rivers. "By the way, Hastings, how would the old gentleman fancy a match between his heiress and this unknown adventurer, eh ?"

"Like it! I should imagine he would cut her throat first."

"Well, I think he ought to be warned, if there was any friend sufficiently intimate with the family to take so delicate a matter on himself. It would be perfect cruelty not to open his eyes. And I should think the old lady was not much good as a chaperone."

"*Much good!*" echoed Miss Forrester. "How should she be? Why, they've lived in the provinces all their lives! She has no more idea of London manners, or the usages of society here, than my cat. And she'd let that girl bolt with anyone under her very eyes, and never know anything of it till it was over."

"You wrong Miss Evans, in supposing she would ever so far demean herself as to consent

to an elopement with anyone, Miss Forrester," said Hastings, warmly. "She may be countrified, but she is a girl of the highest principles."

"Oh! I don't doubt it. But these silent streams run very deep, sometimes; and your mealy-mouthed misses are generally the ones who contrive to help themselves on the sly. I daresay butter will not melt in Miss Lucilla's mouth when you are present, doctor, but then you must remember young ladies are hardly likely to show off their tricks before their medical man."

"I fancy she forgot you were present when we had that little *exposé* this evening," said Madame. "But now, really, Dr. Hastings, if you are a friend of the family, her illness might form an excellent loophole for your ordering the poor girl away. It would really be a pity to see a nice woman like that sacrificed to a needy adventurer."

"And Miss Lucilla's removal would necessi-

tate Miss Vereker's return home," put in Captain Rivers; "so that you would be killing two birds with one stone, Hastings."

"And conferring a real obligation on your friends," said Miss Forrester. "Mr. Evans and his new *protégé* left together, could not do much harm to one another."

It was wonderful how eager they all suddenly became to further the interests of the Evans family. Captain Rivers had an urgent reason to see Lizzie Vereker removed from Don Valera's influence—Dr. Hastings naturally desired Lucilla's absence, from the same cause—Madame de Toutlemonde wished to have her revenge on the heartless Spaniard—and even Miss Forrester foresaw a large increase of benefits likely to accrue from the unused luxuries of the house in Hyde Park Gardens. And so, one and all, they suddenly discovered that the Evans had been so good to them, and were so estimable in themselves, that it be-

hoved them as Christians to see they were not imposed upon, and made miserable by the impostor they were nurturing in their household.

"I begin to think I should only be doing my duty in speaking to Mr. Evans on the subject," said Tom Hastings, thoughtfully.

The quartette had now been conferring together for too long a time not to excite observation.

"What are all you naughty people talking about in this corner?" cried kittenish Miss Charlotte, as she shook a skinny finger at them. "You really must make your conversation more general, or we shall insist upon knowing the subject of it."

"We were saying what a delightful evening we have had, and how clever your charades were, Miss Lillietrip," replied the marquise, unhesitatingly.

"Ah, you mustn't call them *our* charades,

Marquise, for that charming Don Valera got them all up from beginning to end. Doesn't he act beautifully? What a name he would make for himself upon the stage. As I said to him to-night: 'Don! why don't you turn professional?—you'd make your fortune;' and he coloured up—positively he coloured—as he replied, 'You flatter me, madame.' He is very charming in his manner, don't you think so? So thoroughly foreign. My sister and I are quite in love with him, I assure you—positively and truly—we fight about him. How did you like our dresses, Marquise? Pretty, were they not? The Don chose the colours. I think his own dress was superb. I wonder where he got it from. And the fair wig altered his appearance so entirely in the second charade, I hardly knew him. But we like him in his own hair best. So uncommon. What a pity dear Lucilla was taken ill. I wish you could have given her something to revive her,

doctor. We were disappointed at their all leaving so soon. Still, we hope soon to have the pleasure of their company again. These charades have been so successful, my sister and I think of getting up some more, and they have all promised to act for us; and perhaps next time, if we have something *very quiet indeed,* Miss Lucilla might be persuaded to take a part in them."

"*Not if I can prevent it!*" thought Dr. Hastings, as the loquacious Charlotte began to chatter to somebody else, and the quartette dispersed about the room. "Why, the very devil seems in this Spanish brute. Even these dried-up old women flutter their wings at sight of him. *More charades?* No! I think we've had enough of them. Madame is right, change of air will be the best thing in the world for Lucy. The weather is very hot for the season of the year, and London is the worst place on earth for an invalid. I'll get her

mother to take her down to Bournemouth or St. Leonards, until this foreigner is on his way back to New York. Confound the brute! How I wish we had never had a sight of his ugly face!" Which only proves how much imagination has to do with our convictions, and how differently the same objects may appear to different eyes.

Whilst the real Christobal Valera, fighting against the inroads fever had made in his constitution, and struggling with the dreadful doubts engendered by Leona's mysterious disappearance, was dreaming of her lost face as the loveliest vision that had ever blest his sight, Dr. Hastings, viewing it from another and more distorted point of view, pronounced it *ugly*, and believed it to be what he said.

Whilst Lucilla Evans, who in her weakness and timidity shrunk from the generality of the sterner sex, as something too rough and loud-

spoken to give her any pleasure, considered Leona Lacoste, in her male attire, to be the very perfection of all she had ever dreamed of as amiable, and gentle, and winning in a man, Captain Rivers spoke contemptuously of the disguised woman as "*an undersized, flabby foreigner.*"

Whilst Lizzie Vereker thought the supposed Valera the most charmingly handsome and fascinating boy in creation (and Leona could be very fascinating when she chose), Madame la Marquise dubbed him "bearish, ill-mannered, and a fool;" and Miss Forrester marvelled that any of these people should take the trouble either to like, or dislike, or be afraid of, so utterly contemptible and insignificant a personage as Mr. Evans' Spanish correspondent.

But Dr. Hastings was afraid of him; and, after a night's cogitation, resolved at all hazards to tell Mr. Evans that town air was likely to

injure his daughter's health. He broached the subject very cautiously, but the merchant took alarm at once. It has been observed before that the object of Mr. Evans' life appeared to be to give pleasure, or heap benefits upon this girl. No pleasure was worth anything if Lucilla could not take part in it. No luxury was worth the procuring unless it were to add to her comfort or enjoyment. For her sake he had come to London and furnished his splendid house, and for her sake he was ready to give it all up to-morrow, and take a trip to the Andes, or the Himalayas, or any other outlandish and inaccessible quarter of the globe.

"But you are getting on too fast," said Dr. Hastings, as his friend proposed one plan after another. "There is no need whatever that you should break up your establishment, or even leave town yourself. Lucilla is not ill, but this warm weather makes London atmosphere very enervating, and I should strongly advise

her mother taking her down quietly to the seaside until the season is passed, and you are able to join them there."

"And you really think that is all that is necessary? Because, you know, my dear Tom, money is no consideration, and if you advise the climate of Italy or Spain——"

"My dear Mr. Evans, you quite mistake the case. Your daughter's constitution wants bracing, not relaxing. Sea-bathing would do her all the good in the world. It is evident town does not agree with her. She had a very weakening attack of hysteria whilst at the Misses Lillietrip's last night."

"So her mother told me. She quite alarmed me with her account of Lucy's illness. What do you suppose can have caused it, my dear Tom?"

"Nothing but fatigue and heat, joined to a little excitement. But the fact that so small an excitement can produce such unusual results

with her, is proof positive she should not indulge in it."

"It would certainly be inconvenient for me to leave town at present," said Mr. Evans, thoughtfully. "I expect to be very busy for the next week or two; besides, I have that fellow Valera on my hands."

"If you can get Lucy out of London, there is not the least necessity for any one but Mrs. Evans accompanying her."

"I am afraid they will find it very dull at the seaside all by themselves. Lucilla appeared to be so delighted at the prospect of her little party at the Lillietrips."

"Exactly so, and see the harm it did her. She has no strength for dissipation."

"I hope she won't object to go, Tom; but you see we have never thwarted the dear child in anything."

"I should think she would hardly be so unreasonable as to risk her health by refusing

to take my advice. But if you think she will feel the change, sir, why not send down Miss Vereker with her? They appear to be excellent friends."

"So I will; and for the matter of that, Valera might go too, till I want him. We can't begin his business for another fortnight at the earliest."

"I don't think I should send Don Valera with them, Mr. Evans," quickly interposed Tom Hastings. "I would not even broach the subject if I were you. What Lucilla wants is perfect rest and quiet, and you will excuse me for saying that a man who is incessantly talking, or singing, or acting, is not calculated to ward off excitement from an emotional woman. If you send any one but Miss Vereker and her mother with her, you may just as well keep your daughter at home, for the sea air will do her no good at all."

"You really think so? Well, I'm sur-

prised to hear it, for I have always thought Lucy took so much pleasure in Valera's society. He's not like us great rough Englishmen, you know, Tom. There's something so nice and quiet and soft-spoken about the boy, that appears to suit the timid nerves of my poor delicate little girl. However, if you say she had better go alone, there's an end of it."

"I am quite sure that the fewer companions you send with her the better, and they must certainly be of her own sex. You will forgive my having mentioned the subject, Mr. Evans. I thought it but right you should know."

"I should never have forgiven you if you had *not* mentioned it, my dear boy," replied the merchant, as he held out his hand. "I know the friendly feeling you entertain for my family, and can never sufficiently thank you for the interest you take in us. My wife shall

broach the subject to Lucy before the day is over, and you shall know the result to-morrow."

But the result was very different from what they had anticipated.

On the proposal being made to her, Lucilla Evans at once plumply refused to leave London. She didn't care what Dr. Hastings' opinion was. He was a nasty, spiteful creature, to have spoken to papa about her at all; and she was not going to take his advice. *So there!* She was very happy in London—perfectly happy and perfectly well—and she liked going out to parties; and she meant to go to the next she was asked to, whatever Dr. Hastings might think or say. Meek little Mrs. Evans was at her wits' end what argument to use next. She had been so much accustomed for years past to be completely ruled by her invalid daughter, that she no more dreamed of interposing her authority in

the matter than of carrying Lucilla bodily out of London.

"But, my dear," she said, persuasively, "if it is for the sake of your precious health, you know——"

"It's not for my health, mamma; it's because the wretch has got a spite against me, and wants me to go, because he sees I'm happy here. But I won't go till the season's over. It's my first season in London, and I mean to enjoy it, as far as I can. Fancy turning out of this house just as we've furnished it from top to toe, and all! It's ridiculous—absurd. Nobody but a stupid old doctor would have thought of proposing such a thing."

"But Dr. Hastings has always been so careful of you, my dear. And he considers London too relaxing at this time of the year, and that Bournemouth or Brighton would do you so much more good——"

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s tched if I couldn't—if I couldn't——"

"If you couldn't *what?*" demanded h
mother, with perfect innocence.

"Bother Bournemouth and Brighton! I won't go, then, mamma—once for all. And, pray, what would papa do, cooped up in this house alone? *He* can't leave the business to look after itself. It's too absurd. Pray don't say anything more about it."

"Oh my dear! your father would do well enough without us. Tom would be backwards and forwards, naturally enough, to see him; and his gentlemen friends would come and dine with him. And then there's young Valera staying in the house, you know."

But at the mention of that magic name, Lucilla burst into tears, and the murder was out.

"Oh mamma! don't take me away—pray don't take me away! I don't want to go—I can't go," she sobbed. "I should be so wretched if I couldn't—if I couldn't——"

"If you couldn't *what?*" demanded her mother, with perfect innocence.

"If I couldn't see *him*," exclaimed Lucilla, with a fresh burst of grief.

For a few moments Mrs. Evans was all bewilderment.

"Is it your papa you mean, my dear?" she asked, in a mystified manner; "because of course he would run down to see you at the least every week or so."

"No! no! no! I don't mean papa."

"Dr. Hastings, then?"

At this juncture had Lucilla Evans been a gentleman she would certainly have used a naughty word. It is very hard that there should be no naughty words that a woman may use with impunity in the time of need. Why should one sex be legally permitted the privilege of safety valves, whilst the other must explode without caution?

But in this, as in all things, the men have the best of it.

"Bother Dr. Hastings," cried the young

lady, energetically. And here I must remark that had she spelt "bother" with four letters instead of six it would have meant no more than it did. "Haven't I told you, mamma, that I hate his very name. I wish I had never seen him—nasty, selfish, interfering creature.'

"But stay, my dear, *who* is it that you are so unwilling to leave? Confide in me, dear Lucilla. You know that your papa and I have but one wish, and that is to make you happy."

"Oh, can't you *guess?*" asked the girl emphatically

"You don't mean this young Spanish friend of your papa's, do you?" said Mrs. Evans, as if she were suggesting the most unlikely thing possible, and fully expected her daughter to refute it.

"*Of course* I do! Who else is there worth caring about in all the world? Oh mamma! he is so nice—so clever—so amiable—I have

never met anyone like him in my life before. When he is with me, playing chess, or singing, or talking, the time passes away so quickly; and when he is gone—oh! it is all so dull and blank. And now you want me to go down to the seaside, and leave him up here in town with papa, and I can't. I can't, mamma. It would kill me to go away. Oh! do say that I may stop in town till the end of the season."

"But, Lucilla," said Mrs. Evans, whose breath had almost been taken away by this unexpected announcement, "am I to understand then—am I to tell your papa——"

"Oh! you're not to tell papa anything," exclaimed Lucilla. "You are not to say a word about it, mamma. Promise me you won't. Only persuade him that I am quite well and happy here, and that there is no need for me to go to the seaside, and don't let me see that wretch, Dr. Hastings, for the next few days, or I shall kill him."

"And you have actually conceived an attachment for that boy, Valera," said Mrs. Evans, musingly.

"Oh! don't put it in so many words. It sounds dreadful. I only like him, you know; and everybody does that. Only, why should I go away? Promise me you won't breathe a word to papa about—about *that*—will you? Oh! why was I ever such a fool as to say anything? But it slipped out before I knew what I was doing. Only *promise*—won't you? —that you'll never say anything to anybody."

Mrs. Evans promised, as a matter of course, and likewise, as a matter of course, she made her way straight down from Lucilla's side to her husband's study, where she told him the whole story.

"My dear Henry, I've got a terrible piece of news for you. Lucy's in love with that Spanish friend of yours—she has just told me all about it; but I promised the utmost

secrecy, so you must consider this communication as strictly confidential."

"Lucilla in love with Valera! Why, she's old enough to be his mother."

"Well, not quite that, my dear, but she must be several years his senior. However, whether or no, the mischief is done, and she utterly refuses to go to the seaside away from him."

"Has Valera been speaking of love to her?"

"I should imagine not. Lucy said nothing about that. Only it's very evident what is making her ill. It's the worry, and fretting, and suspense. She begged I would say nothing to you on the subject, but I felt it to be my duty. She was in a terrible state of distress just now."

"*In love with Valera,*" said Henry Evans, musingly. "Now, what are we to do about it, my dear?"

"What can you do about it but let matters

take their course, Henry. It's most unfortunate in every way, but it's not to be thought of, is it? We know nothing about the young man, even if he were fond of Lucy."

"True; but I fancy I know as much as is necessary. And as for money, my dear, you know she will have plenty for both. The first question is, how will disappointment affect the girl's health? She is very delicate and sensitive, and fretting may do her a great deal of harm. You mustn't let her get depressed or anxious. Keep up her spirits, and if after awhile she seems really in earnest, why——"

"You wouldn't let her marry him?" cried Mrs. Evans, in astonishment.

"Why not, my dear? why not? What object have I ever had with regard to Lucy's bringing up except her happiness? At any risks or personal loss to myself, it must be secured. And I don't know that young

Valera would be such a bad match for her. He is a gentleman, there is no doubt of that, and we have tried to make Lucilla a lady. They might both do worse."

"Well, I'm glad to find you take it in that spirit," said his wife, "and it's as well I told you. I suppose the seaside trip is to be put off then?"

"Most decidedly! Go at once and set Lucy's mind at rest on that score. I will have nothing done, or even proposed, that is in any way distasteful to her. My wish is that she has her way in all things. And with respect to the other business, don't let her know you have told me; but watch, my dear—watch, and I will watch with you."

CHAPTER IX.

AN EXCEPTIONAL PROPOSAL.

LEONA had not seen so much of Mr. Evans since the evening of the charade-party, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that she had avoided him more. She had every desire to watch his actions, and gain further proof of what she suspected from his conversation, but intuitively she shrank from the close contact she had hitherto maintained with him. His strange behaviour at the representation of the charade had excited her worst suspicions. Nothing but guilt, she argued, and the fear of detection, could render a man so weak and sensitive. Unpleasant memories might have been raised in his breast by her acting, but

had he been innocent, he would have been able to stamp them down, and curb himself to sit out the little drama. Such ideas necessarily raised a great barrier between their familiar intercourse. Leona had never liked her uncle. Now, she positively hated him. Her distorted imagination made her picture in him the murderer, whose crime had driven his brother and her father to drag out the remainder of his life in exile; whose meanness could permit another to carry the burden of his guilt upon his shoulders; and whose conscience could permit himself to be enriched and wax fat upon the wealth his treachery had earned for him. She thought, if this were true, that nothing in the whole world could be more wicked, base, and contemptible than this same uncle of hers; and she held as much aloof from him as possible, brooding on her supposed wrongs, and turning over in her mind by what means she should bring the criminal to detection.

Mr. Evans saw the change, but he naturally attributed it to the intelligence he had heard from his wife, and concluded that Valera was either questioning his own heart, and the probabilities of his success with Lucilla; or having observed the girl's predilection, was meditating on the best course of action to be pursued with regard to her.

"In either case," thought Mr. Evans astutely, "the lad would naturally be shy of me. If he aspires to Lucy's hand he probably imagines it is a presumption I shall never forgive. Whilst, if he does not care for her, he would be equally afraid of offending me in consequence. And I must not forget that his hopes of advancement lie, in some measure now, through myself. But I won't have the young fellow's mind biassed. He's a good lad, and a gentlemanly lad; but it would be a great thing for a clerk to marry Lucilla, and I must know a little more about him before I let

matters come to a crisis. Meanwhile the young people shall have complete licence to associate with one another, and find out their own minds. And then, if I see it all go on favourably, I'll have a quiet talk with Valera, and discover what he wishes."

In consequence of this decision on the part of Mr. Evans, which was duly repeated to his wife, Leona found herself thrown even more than before into the society of Lucilla; and unmindful of the trap laid for her and the eyes watching her actions, she fell readily into the snare. The truth was, she rather liked the companionship of this quiet sickly girl who was so ready to devote long hours to the familiar conversation by which Leona hoped to find out much of what she desired to know. She saw day by day that Lucy welcomed her more and more warmly, and attempted to detain her longer; and she was pleased at the interest evinced in her, and did all she could

to show she felt it. She had never kissed Miss Evans as she had done Lizzie Vereker.

Not only had that little episode taught her to be more careful, but she scarcely ever remembered, whilst by Lucilla's side, that she wore the garb of a man. For the girl did nothing to remind her of it. She was too passive, too depressed, too much absorbed in her own weakness, to display any violent emotion. The affection she had conceived for Leona was perhaps the highest flight of love-making to which her sickly imagination had ever soared; yet it was, after all, but a very diluted imitation of the grand passion, so much so that the person towards whom it was directed never recognised it as such. She saw that Lucilla's eyes brightened at her approach —that she appeared content and happy whilst she sat by her sofa playing chess or singing Spanish serenades to the accompaniment of the guitar; perhaps even she may have felt the

hand she held morning and evening, tremble a little in her grasp, but, after all, what do such symptoms amount to? One woman may evince them for another, and Leona was glad to be able to please the invalid by any attentions in her power. So she continued to sing to Mr. Evans' daughter, and to play chess and talk with her, until their pleasant intercourse was brought to an unexpected close after this manner.

It was morning, and the breakfast at the great house was just concluded.

Lucilla had been absent from the meal, and mamma Evans had reported privately and mysteriously to papa that her absence was caused by a violent headache, brought on after a prolonged fit of crying the night before, induced by her having seen Lizzie Vereker slip a three-cornered note into Don Valera's hand as they were all going up to bed.

"And really," concluded Mrs. Evans, "I

think it is time you spoke, Henry; for Lucy seems to be always crying about something or other now, and her appetite is nothing to what it used to be."

The effect of which advice was that, as the breakfast-party were leaving the table, Mr. Evans asked Valera to accompany him to his study. Leona followed her uncle briskly. She hoped he was about to open the subject of business between them; for not only was she getting sick of the idle life she was leading, but she knew that before long, answers to the letters announcing her arrival in England must be received from the New York firm, and necessitate her flight. She wanted to be more generally engaged before that crisis arrived, so that her disappearance from the present scene of action might be the easier accomplished; and she longed to have the opportunity to embark upon a larger field of discovery, and bring her long-desired object to a close.

She had lingered on in the house in Hyde Park Gardens, picking up from day to day such crumbs of information as she thought might prove useful to her in the future; but she had felt of late that she had come to the end of her tether, and there was nothing more to be gained by remaining there. And she had had the seed of the next step to be taken germinating in her brain for weeks past, and only needing a word, as it were, to bring it into being. And that word she was just about to hear.

"Sit down, Valera. Make yourself comfortable. I want your attention for a moment or two before I go out this morning."

"About the business, I presume, monsieur," said Leona, seating herself.

"Well, no; not about the business exactly. I want to speak to you about Lucilla. You are very good friends with my daughter, are you not, Valera?"

Mr. Evans looked Leona steadily in the face as he said this, but Leona did not blush.

"Miss Evans has been kind enough to permit me to enjoy a good deal of her society, monsieur, and I think I may say, without presumption, that she regards me as a friend. I *hope* she does."

"Exactly so. And friendship between two such young people as yourselves is but another name for affection, eh?"

"Yes. I think Miss Evans likes me," returned Leona.

Mr. Evans thought the young man had rather a cool and unembarrassed way of expressing his feelings; but perhaps he wished to find out the father's opinion on the subject before he confessed his own.

"I think she does, too; and as this may lead to a still greater intimacy between us, I should like to know all you can tell me about yourself, Valera—your birth, parentage, and

connections; bringing-up, expectations, and so on. Treat me as a friend, my dear boy, and tell me everything."

Now, when Leona had resolved to take Don Christobal Valera's name, she had resolved also to borrow his antecedents. She knew that, at the best, it could be but a very short time before the fraud she had perpetrated would be discovered, and that when that came to pass she must vanish, and Christobal have his own again. She argued that whilst she bore his name (so long as she did nothing to disgrace it) she could not harm him by adopting his relations, and therefore she had never hesitated to speak of them, as she now did, boldly and without reserve.

"I fear I have very little to tell you, monsieur, that you have not already heard. My grandfather was an Hidalgo, of Spain, who was banished from his country for political intrigue, and settled in the Brazils. There

my father was born and married; there he begot me, and died before I was ten years old. My mother, Donna Josefa, with the help of the padre, brought me up somehow; and, with the assistance of my godfather, who was a merchant at Rio, I procured the appointment of Spanish correspondent in the firm of Messrs. Halliday and Upjohn, which has given me the advantage of your acquaintance. My faith, as you know, is the faith of my country and forefathers. As for my prospects, they are *nil.* Had I any, monsieur, I should not now be a clerk in a counting-house. You will forgive my warmth, I trust, but the remembrance nettles me."

"All right, Valera. Don't say a word about it. The letter I received from your employers told me you were a gentleman. your own appearance and manners more than confirm the statement. As for your prospects, I was foolish to mention them. I might have

known they were bounded by the trade in which you have embarked. Though, with interest and friends to back you, the circle may be a wide one. Look at me."

"You have certainly been *most fortunate*, monsieur," said Leona, significantly; "but, if report speaks truth, you have been happy enough to inherit also the wealth of others."

"*Happy* enough!" repeated Mr. Evans. "Ah, Valera, people who speak of me like that do not know the truth."

"Perhaps not, monsieur."

"But I did not come here this morning to speak of myself, but of you. Of course I knew you had no fortune, but in mentioning your prospects, I should rather have asked, do you intend to adhere steadily to the trade you have chosen?"

"Unless something better turns up," replied Leona, cautiously. "I have a great and glorious object in view, Mr. Evans, a noble

ambition before me, and I mean to pursue it to the end, or perish."

For the moment she had forgotten herself, and feared she had said too much. But Mr. Evans attributed her enthusiasm entirely to her desire to gain Lucilla.

"Just so. I guessed as much. Now, my dear Valera, you have been candid with me, and I shall be the same with you. Mrs. Evans and I have observed your affection for Lucilla, we could not fail to do so, and hers for you; and we are quite willing, sooner than destroy the dear girl's happiness, which is very precious to us, to smooth over all little difficulties, and let it end in the usual way."

"*In the usual way?*" repeated Leona, with open mouth.

"Yes, in your marriage. We should not, perhaps, have been so hasty in bringing matters to a conclusion had not Lucy's health been so delicate, but as it is——"

"*Lucilla wishes to marry me!*" said Leona, with the same look of blank astonishment.

"Well, I have not yet sounded her on the subject. I wished to speak to you first; but naturally I conclude she does, and that your own hopes aspire to that end also. Now, I know that the idea must be rather a startling one to you, and perhaps you have hardly even dared to hope to yourself that it might be; but since Mrs. Evans and I have seen that Lucilla's happiness is concerned in it, I resolved to tell you that, as far as money is concerned, the way will be smooth enough before you, as I have more than I require for my own need, and have always determined that the want of it should be no obstacle to Lucilla's having the man of her choice."

Leona took out her handkerchief and wiped the perspiration off her brow.

She was a brave woman and a bold woman,

but she was not quite prepared for this. At first she thought of utterly disclaiming having taken any interest beyond that of friendship in Miss Lucilla Evans, and repudiating the idea of marriage between them as something sacrilegious. But the next moment's thought made her see how imprudent under the circumstances such a course would be. It would naturally rouse the indignation of her host, who would consider his daughter's affections had been trifled with, and banish her from his house without the shadow of a chance of regaining an entrance there. And Leona had learned to be very wary how she trod upon the social eggs amongst which she moved. She leaned back in her chair with her handkerchief still pressed to her brow, and thought.

"Take your time," said Mr. Evans mildly; "I see I have surprised you. Don't hurry yourself."

An idea flashed through her clever brain.

She perceived how by temporising she might turn this matter to her own advantage.

"You *did* take me by surprise, monsieur," she said, after a moment's pause; "the prospect you hold out to me is too flattering—so brilliant—so far beyond my poor deserts—it has taken my breath away."

"I thought so, Valera, but take courage. My daughter loves you. She has confessed as much to her mother, and we are both disposed to favour your suit."

"Madame and you are too good—too condescending," murmured Leona, "and I can but trust you will never regret your kindness. If to be the—the—*husband* of Miss Evans is not too exalted a lot for me—a position to which I can never do credit—then, monsieur, what remains for me to do but to accept your generous offer, and bless the day you made it? Yet, if you will not think me too bold——"

"Say what you think, Valera. I wish you to be perfectly frank with me."

"Rumours have reached me—they may be idle tales, and in that case you will pardon my mentioning them—but I *have* heard that Miss Lucilla is not your own daughter, monsieur! Is that the truth?"

Mr. Evans knitted his brow at this question, but he answered it promptly.

"Don Valera! I will be open with you. Under the circumstances I should have been so in any case, although I cannot conceive who has had sufficient interest in my private affairs to discuss them with a stranger——"

"Pardon me, monsieur, but I have spoken of Mademoiselle Lucilla to all the world——"

"Ah, very true; but I, myself, have never spoken of the subject, nor intended to do so, except to the man Lucilla might marry. *She is not my daughter, Valera.* I tell you so frankly—but she is as dear to me as if she

were, and her dowry will be the same as though she had been."

"And may I ask, then, whose daughter she is?"

"I suppose you have a right to do so, though it can make no difference to you, as all her relations are dead. Her father was an old and trusted friend of my uncle's, Mr. Theophilus Evans. His name was Anson—a good name in our country, Valera—but he died suddenly, leaving this one orphan child behind him. No one appearing disposed to take charge of her, my uncle, with his usual generosity, immediately placed the infant under the care of a widow lady in the country, and when I married I brought her home to my wife, who, having no little ones of her own, has been a real mother to Lucy ever since. And that is the whole history, Valera."

"It does honour to your goodness and

purity of intention, monsieur," remarked his hearer, dryly.

"Oh, as to that," rejoined the merchant, wiping his heated face, "least said soonest mended. There is the girl, as much a lady as any you'll find in the land, and she has chosen you for her husband. She might have looked higher, but I'm an advocate for people listening to what their own hearts say in such matters, and, as I've observed before, her fortune goes with her."

"Lucy told me that she had once lived in the country with a Mr. and Mrs.——" said Leona, pretending to puzzle over the name, which, for her own purposes, she was most anxious to ascertain rightly.

"A Mrs. Gibson," replied Mr. Evans promptly. "Yes, to be sure, Mrs. Gibson, of Willowside, in Sussex; though I should hardly think Lucy could remember that time."

"She seemed to remember it very well,

monsieur, and the fact of your fetching her away to Liverpool."

"Strange! I should have thought the child must have forgotten it all long ago, though I hear the old lady is living yet. Still, it little matters now."

"No, indeed," said Leona.

There was a pause between them, neither knowing what to say next. Mr. Evans broke it by observing:

"Well, Valera, I suppose then we may consider this matter settled?"

"In what way could I answer you but one, monsieur, when you know that my fortunes hang upon the issue of the question? That I am utterly unworthy of the honour you design for me, I feel more and more with every word you say. But it is not in my power to refuse so much happiness. It has overwhelmed—blinded me. May I ask one great favour of you? I received this

morning an invitation from some friends I made at the Misses Lillietrip's, to spend a few days with them at Streatham, and at the end of that time—Monday or Tuesday at farthest—I shall have had leisure to think over this great and unexpected proposal, and to thank you for it as I should. At the present moment I am stunned."

"I think your idea a very sensible and reasonable one, Valera. Lucilla knows nothing of what has passed between us, so that her mind will not be disturbed by suspense or agitation. You will say nothing, of course, to her on the subject; but go to your friends, and from there you can write to me, if you prefer it, and tell me all your mind."

"Monsieur is too good," said Leona, in a voice that slightly trembled. For liar and murderer as she believed the man before her to be, she could not help feeling that in this instance, at least, he was treating her with

greater kindness than she deserved. Yet the weakness was momentary; for with the next breath she drew she remembered that he was but trying to forward the happiness of the *murdered man's child*, as a propitiatory offering to the manes of his remorseful conscience.

"I will just put my things together, bid adieu to madame and mademoiselle, and start for Streatham at once then," she said, rising to her feet.

"Just so, Valera, and the carriage will be at your disposal when you choose to order it," replied Mr. Evans.

"And you will say nothing to Lucilla until I return?" she added, looking wistfully into his face.

She did not wish the feelings of the poor sickly girl, who had been so very weak as to fall in love with her, to be more roughly handled than was necessary.

"*Certainly not!*" was Mr. Evans' decisive answer. "Not a word shall be broached on the subject until you give us leave;" and thereupon Leona, sorely against her will, was forced to take an apparently friendly farewell of the man she hated, and had sworn to hunt down, if needful, to his death.

There was some little surprise exhibited in the drawing-room at the announcement of her departure. Mrs. Evans peered at her inquiringly above her spectacles, but was reassured by Leona's blushing cheek and quiet smile. Lizzie Vereker openly gave vent to her expressions of disgust, and professed to be so offended that she would not shake hands with the young Spaniard at parting. But poor Lucy laid her hand so confidingly in hers that Leona's heart smote her for the mischief she might have caused; although the ludicrous side of it was so omnipresent with her, that she was longing to get away to some place by herself,

if only to be able to indulge in a genuine shout of laughter at the absurd mistake into which the poor invalid had fallen. She managed to shake free of all three ladies at last, and (Mr. Evans having already quitted the house) to pack her possessions (they were not numerous) without the fact becoming noticeable. She declined the use of the carriage, and drove in a cab to the Victoria Station, where she deposited her luggage. Then she looked out for a small hotel in the vicinity, where she ordered dinner, and allowed herself time to think over her plans. With a brain of fire, and an energy of iron, she was not long either in bringing them to perfection or putting them into force.

As soon as her meal was concluded, she sauntered into the Buckingham Road, and with ready money at her command, found no difficulty in procuring all that she required from one or other of the numerous

emporiums of female millinery that pervade that district.

At a latish hour a young man strolled upon the platform of the Brighton Railway. He had a light portmanteau, which he was anxious should be put into the carriage with him. He was also very anxious to secure the compartment to himself.

"Want to go alone—expect a friend to join me a few stations farther on. Don't you twig, old fellow?" he said jocosely, as he dug the guard in the ribs with his little cane.

The guard did "twig," but he didn't see the force of the argument just yet.

"Very difficult, sir. Express train, you see. Going against orders," he answered firmly, until a glittering yellow sixpence found its way miraculously into his palm, and he altered his tune, and said he would "try his best to oblige the gentleman."

Which best was so very good, that the

gentleman presently found the door of his compartment locked, and a large placard with "Engaged" stuck across the window, whilst he and the light box he had desired should travel with him were flying through the night air at the rate of forty miles per hour, and no stoppage to speak of all the way.

When, at last, the panting engine drew up in the Brighton terminus, and the active porters, throwing the carriage-doors open, came to that one marked "Engaged," they discovered its solitary occupant to be a very beautiful woman, dressed in the height of the fashion, with a spotted veil drawn tightly over her face.

"Want a cab, miss?" exclaimed three of them at once.

"If you please. And will you tell me which is the best hotel to go to here?" she answered, in the prettiest of foreign accents.

"Oh, the Grand is the best, miss," was the

porter's reply. "A fine big 'un, close to the sea." And thereupon the beautiful woman was put with her luggage into a cab and driven off to the Grand Hotel.

"And now," she thought, as she found herself once more safely landed on a new field of action, "now for one night's rest, and then to find out what I can from Mrs. Gibson of Willowside."

CHAPTER X.

THE RECLUSE OF WILLOWSIDE.

BRIGHTON, which is always gay and pleasant, was looking its very best when Leona first saw it, and to the Brazilian-bred girl, who had never had an opportunity of visiting a large watering-place in her life before, offered every inducement to remain a few days amongst its novel attractions. But she was too seriously bent upon accomplishing the object of her life to have leisure even to think of such frivolities as bands, aquariums, piers, esplanades, and cockle-boats.

Her whole desire was to find out the geography of the country, and how far Willowside might happen to be from Brighton. A

friendly waiter at the "Grand," taking compassion on her foreign extraction, and not entirely untouched by her lofty style of beauty ("like one of them big female statties at the Aquarium," as he remarked confidentially to his fellow-waiters), took upon himself to procure the desired information for her; and she ascertained that a few hours' travelling by cross-country trains would bring her to the village where Mrs. Gibson was said to reside.

"But it's a rare poor place, miss, I hear," said the friendly waiter, "and no hotel anyway near it. I don't know how you'll manage, unless you're going to friends."

"I am going to friends," replied Leona, shortly; for she was unwilling to let anybody know more of her movements than was absolutely necessary; and glad to find that Willowside was at some distance from Brighton, and a place unlikely to attract attention.

But as she travelled down to it, she was

unable to tell herself what issue she expected from an interview (even if she obtained it) with the quondam guardian of Lucilla Anson. All the information she had gained through the Evans was that, on her father being murdered, the child had been placed with this lady till she was eight years old, and then taken back to Liverpool to live with Henry Evans and his wife. Whether the girl's true parentage had ever been confided to Mrs. Gibson was doubtful; and even if it had been, she was unlikely—living in that remote Sussex village—to have heard more than—or even so much of the murder and its surroundings—as Leona herself. All these facts were indisputable, and yet she would have left a stone unturned by not going to see Mrs. Gibson. She could not even say what she *hoped* might come of it, she only knew that it was part of her task to go.

Leona looked very handsome as she travelled down to Willowside. It was the

first time she had ever adopted complete English female costume, and the passengers by the same train turned to gaze at her again and again as she passed. She had robed herself completely in black—the only colour that her unusual height would bear—but she looked like a queen as she moved majestically across the platform, and might have been drawn for a reclining Cleopatra as she cast herself grandly upon the cushioned seat of the carriage. In order to avoid singularity she had been compelled to adopt the inevitable false chignon behind, but her own thick short curls still adorned her brow and the sides of her head, and were very suitable to her style of countenance. As the name her father had adopted in his exile bore no significance in England, she had determined to use it when assuming her own part, and was travelling as Miss Lacoste. What she intended to say to Mrs. Gibson, or how account for her unex-

pected visit, she decided with herself as she went along. Willowside was an out-of-the-way village at the farther end of Sussex, and Leona had several changes to make, and intervals of waiting to try her patience, before she reached it. At the close of the summer's afternoon, however, she found herself at the nearest market-town, and engaged what accommodation she could procure there for the night, before she walked on to Willowside.

"Do you know an old lady of the name of Gibson, living at Willowside?" she inquired of the fresh-looking country girl who brought her some refreshment previous to starting.

"Do you mean the bed-ridden lady in Acacia Cottage?" demanded the girl.

"I suppose so. Are there two of that name in the village?"

"Not that I know of, miss. But this

one's a regular invalid. I don't think anyone's seen her not for years—except it's the woman that looks after her. She's been very bad, so I hear, this ever so long time, and can't remember anybody or anything. I come from Willowside myself, miss."

"Indeed. I'm sorry to hear Mrs. Gibson is so ill," said Leona, wondering if she had made that long journey for nothing.

"Have you come to see her, miss? for I don't think they let no one in. The old lady never goes out of one room, except into the other. But perhaps you're a relation, and it may be different."

"I shall, at all events, try," replied Leona; and after sundry directions concerning turning to the right and turning to the left, which sounded almost like Greek in her unpractised ears, she set off walking across the fields to Willowside.

The information of the girl at the inn

had so depressed her that she anticipated no results at all from her excursion. It was hardly likely she would be admitted to the presence of the invalid; and if she were, she could not expect to gain much useful knowledge from a memory weakened by old age and paralysis. Yet she was still determined to try.

An hour's walk across the fields brought her to Willowside, and Acacia Cottage looked very pretty and rural, embowered in honeysuckle and climbing roses. Leona had to ring two or three times before anyone attended to her summons, and then the door was opened by a hard-featured, middle-aged woman.

"What are you pleased to want?" she inquired, in a tone which indicated that the stranger could only have stopped to ask some question, perfectly irrelevant, of the inhabitants of the cottage.

"Does Mrs. Gibson live here? I want to see her," replied Leona confidently.

"*You want to see the mistress!*" said the woman, in a tone of surprise, as she came outside the door on to the steps. "But you don't know her?"

"I know some old friends of hers, and I want to ask her if she can give me any information about them at the present time," said Leona confidently.

"Oh!—ah! But you don't know *her?* I thought so. I know everybody that she's known for the last thirty years."

At this assertion Leona pricked up her ears. If the mistress's memory proved valueless, the servant's might serve her purpose equally well. She immediately put on her most fascinating manner.

"Ah, then, you must be that very good friend of Mrs. Gibson's I hear of, who tends her so carefully, and never spares any trouble

on her account. Is it not so? Pray let me shake hands with you."

The woman looked gratified, and hastily rubbed her bony hand upon her canvas apron.

"Well I'm sure, miss, you're very good." Yes, I do look after the old lady, and a precious trouble she is to me, as you may guess. But I don't remember your face, miss, and—you'll pardon me I hope—but you're not Sussex bred, are you?"

"Oh no. I am not English. But I love England, madame, and all its people, and I have an English friend whom Mrs. Gibson once knew, of whom I have lost sight, and I came over to Willowside expressly to see if I could gain any information about her present address."

"And what might the lady's name be, miss?" demanded the woman, inquisitively.

But Leona was afraid that if she gratified

her curiosity too readily she would refuse to let her have a sight of Mrs. Gibson.

"I hope you will let me see your mistress," she went on, persuasively. "I will not stay long, or talk much, to fatigue her. But I am very anxious to hear from her own mouth whether she remembers, or knows anything of my friend."

"Lor! miss, you wouldn't get nothing out of the mistress. She's been but a poor creature these many years past, and don't remember anything from day to day. She's lost the use of her limbs too, and has to be carried about like a child, and nice work it is for me, as you may imagine. There's no rest for me, day nor night, and what with her fads, and one thing and another, it's enough to wear a woman out."

"I am sure all her friends ought to be very grateful to you for your kindness to her, madame," said Leona, as she slipped a sovereign

she had reserved for the purpose into the woman's hand. The Sussex charwoman (for she was nothing more) looked at the magic coin with amazement. She had seen from the first that this foreign lady was very different from those that usually passed through the village. Leona's commanding presence and handsome dress, her pretty modulated speech, each word of which dropped slowly and distinctly from her lips, her gracious manner and expression, had already had an effect upon Mrs. Gibson's servant. But when the climax came in the shape of a sovereign, and the title of "madame," the significance of which was patent even to Sussex ears, the charwoman was completely conquered. She closed her hard-working hand firmly over the unexpected present, and unmistakably smiled.

"Of course, miss," she went on, "if you really want to see the poor old woman, why there she is! *I'm* not ashamed, nor afraid,

that no one should see her at any time of the day, for I keep her as neat as a new pin, as our clergyman has often said, when he comes to give her spiritual comfort. But I fear you'll be disappointed about her memory, for it's gone as clean as this tooth from the side of my head, and Mary Jones is just the same to her as Betty Brown, or Sally Anyone else."

But, as she spoke, she pushed the hall door open, and Leona had gained the object she had worked for — an entrance to the presence of Mrs. Gibson.

Through the open parlour she could descry the figure of the frail old woman, propped up by pillows in an arm-chair, with wistful eyes turned meekly, but unmeaningly, towards the direction whence the voices reached her.

Leona did not stand on further ceremony, but, with a hasty word of thanks to the

servant, passed at once into the sitting-room, and approached the invalid.

"You do not know me, madame, I am aware," she commenced, "but I have come to see you to ask after a dear friend of mine."

The old lady looked at her without speaking, then turned to her attendant.

"What does she say, Wallis?"

"She says she's come to get news of a lady as you knew, mum," bawled Wallis into her ear, with the apparent idea that the louder one speaks the better a weak-minded person can understand.

"I don't know her," replied Mrs. Gibson, shaking her head.

She was a delicate, lady-like looking old person, of perhaps seventy, but she did not strike her visitor as being so childish as her servant had made out.

"My name is Lacoste," replied Leona,

going to the point at once, "and I want to find out the present address of Lucy Evans, who used to live with you when she was a child."

"She don't know no Lucy Evans," affirmed Wallis, decisively.

"No, I don't know Lucy Evans," repeated the old lady, feebly.

"Nor never did," added the servant.

Leona started. She trusted to Wallis's memory more than to that of her mistress. Was it possible she could have mistaken the name, the address, the identity altogether of this paralytic?

"But if you have been with Mrs. Gibson thirty years, you must remember," she said, turning to her first acquaintance; "Lucy Evans was here about two-and-twenty years ago. She came from Liverpool, and she went back there when she was eight. A fair child, with blue eyes and pale-coloured hair."

"Are you speaking of *Lucilla Anson?*" demanded Wallis, curiously.

"Yes, yes. I didn't know she was here under that name. She was adopted by a Mr. Evans, you know. You remember her, don't you?"

"Oh yes, miss, I remember *her*," said the servant, dryly.

"Well, it is of that young lady I want news. We knew each other afterwards, long afterwards; but I have heard her speak of Mrs. Gibson, and Willowside. Where is she now? What is she doing? Is she married or single? Tell me all about her!"

"I know nothing to tell," replied Wallis, with compressed lips. "The child was placed here for a spell by Mr. Evans, and a nice trouble she was from first to last. I was precious glad to see the back of her for one. The old lady here had several other children to take care of at the same time, but I don't

suppose she remembers one more than the other."

"What is she talking about?" demanded the invalid, querulously.

"Do you remember Lucilla Anson?" bawled Wallis at her again.

The old woman paused a moment, as though waiting for recollection to come back to her. Then a look of terror passed suddenly over her features, and she began to wail:

"Oh, blood—blood! They murdered him, Wallis. Don't you remember they murdered him? See, they are doing it now! Don't let them come near me! They will murder us both. Let me hide!" and with childish alarm she seized the servant's apron and folded it over her own head.

"Don't you talk such rubbish, or I shall send you to bed," said Wallis, authoritatively. "You see what she is, miss. Quite *gone*, as

you may say, and no rhyme nor reason in anything she says. It's no more use talking to her than to the table."

"It's a curious fancy of hers though, associating Miss Anson's name with blood, because you know, perhaps, her father *was* murdered," said Leona, with the idea of making a bold stroke for her information.

"Oh, you've heard that, have you, miss?" returned Wallis, with a look of relief. "Well, it's no use denying it, then, though me and the mistress were bound over to secrecy at the time, on account of the child not coming to the knowledge of it. It was a dreadful thing, warn't it? I've most forgot the circumstances now; but I know the murderer never was found, which was a great pity, for if ever a fellow deserved to swing, he did."

"I quite agree with you," replied Leona;

"and Mr. Evans was as anxious to bring him to justice as any one. Mr. Evans is a very nice gentleman, isn't he?"

"I never see him, miss——

"You never saw him? Then I suppose *Mrs.* Evans fetched the child away from Willowside?"

"No one fetched the child away, miss. I took her up to London myself, by Mr. Evans' desire, and then a young gentleman from the office met her, and I suppose he took charge of her to Liverpool. I never saw Mr. nor Mrs. Evans in my life. They was too fine, I fancy, to trouble Willowside."

"That is strange," mused Leona. She remembered that Lucilla had mentioned her putative parents taking her home from Sussex to Liverpool, and naturally fancied they must have visited Willowside. Why had her uncle avoided the personal acquaintance of Mrs. Gibson? But the fact made an idea which

she had conceived for the future all the easier of execution.

"I wonder why Mrs. Gibson did not take Miss Lucilla home to Liverpool?" she said to Wallis.

"Lor, miss, the mistress had plenty to do at that time, without running all over the country with her pupils. She kept a school, you understand; quite private it was, and very respectable. But we never held much account of Lucilla Anson. Indeed, I recollect when the mistress first heard who the child was, she was in two minds about taking her at all. It would have been very unpleasant for us if the story about her father had got wind in the village. They're very particular in Willowside, miss."

"No doubt, madame. And so Mrs. Gibson never went to Liverpool?"

"Not she. What would she have to do with a nasty dirty town like that, all docks

and shipping? She never had a call to go."

"Nor seen Mr. or Mrs. Evans?"

"No, nor seen them neither. Nor Miss Lucilla since she left us. Nor didn't want to. We'd enough bother with her whilst she was here."

"Well! I see you cannot help me to her present address, madame, so I need not trouble you any further. I am infinitely obliged to you for the trouble you have taken, and I hope I have not wasted too much of your time."

"Oh lor, no, miss, and I wish I could have obliged you, I'm sure. But you see how it is. The poor old lady's good for nothing, and hasn't been for the last five years; but if she weren't she couldn't have given you any satisfaction, *I* know. We've never had word of Miss Anson since I left her in London that day, and I don't know whether she's dead or

alive. And shouldn't know her from Adam if we met. Which we're not likely to do, unless she travels down here as you have done; for my mistress and me, we're both Sussex bred and born, and haven't moved out of the county for the last twenty years, nor shan't do it till we go to the churchyard. So I wish I could have obliged you, miss, but it's out of my power, and I wish you a very good evening, and——yes, that's the way back, miss, across those fields."

Leona having passed out of the presence of Mrs. Gibson without any more useless words, was just about to retrace her steps to the place she had come from, when a sudden thought struck her.

"One moment, madame," she exclaimed, recalling Wallis to the garden gate; "if neither Mr. nor Mrs. Henry Evans have ever been to Willowside, would you tell me *who* brought Miss Lucilla Anson down here when

she was first placed under Mrs. Gibson's care?"—for she fancied that her uncle might have travelled with the child without discovering his identity to the schoolmistress.

"A sort of a servant, miss; at least she wasn't quite that neither. I don't know *how* I should call her."

"It was a woman, then?"

"Oh yes, miss, it was a woman."

"You're sure it was not Mrs. Evans herself?"

"Well, if it *was* Mrs. Evans, he must be a queer sort of gentleman to have married her. She was a big strapping woman, with a stride like a grenadier, but she seemed monstrous fond of the little girl, and cried when she parted with her."

"Did you hear her name?" demanded Leona, satisfied that at no period could little

Mrs. Evans have been transformed into a "*big strapping woman.*"

"Now you come to speak of it, I *did* hear the child mention her name. Let me see. *Levitt!* Yes, that was how she called her—*Rebecca Levitt.*"

"*Levitt!*" repeated Leona, with a sudden remembrance of the murdered clerk's letter to her father, and the consciousness of another link being forged in the chain that was to lead to her discovery.

"Yes, miss. Do you happen to have heard it too?"

"Oh yes; I knew it very well. I suppose you are sure that *was* the name, madame?"

"Quite sure, miss," reiterated the woman; and then Leona commenced her walk back to the inn in earnest.

As she went, her brain was throbbing with the information she had obtained, and the

uses to which she intended to put it. To an ordinary listener, perhaps, she might not have appeared to have heard anything more from Mrs. Wallis's lips than she had done from those of Lucilla—only that the child had been placed there and taken away again, and there was an end of it. No clue to the mystery of her adoption—not even a confirmation of the fact that Henry Evans was the chief instigator of the arrangements made for her benefit, nor a recognition of him as the person who had interested himself in her welfare whilst there.

But in these very circumstances lay the most valuable intelligence Leona could have received. Mr. and Mrs. Evans were equally unknown to Mrs. Gibson. The parties had never met. *They* had never visited Willowside. *She* had not gone to Liverpool. For reasons of his own (probably, as Leona surmised, to avoid future recognition), Henry Evans had strictly avoided making the ac-

quaintance of the lady in whose charge he had placed his adopted child. He, therefore, could have no knowledge of her personal appearance.

Nor, in her present condition, was Mrs. Gibson ever likely to quit Willowside. Wallis said they had neither of them been out of the county for the past twenty years. Here was another circumstance that promised greatly to aid the new project Leona had in her head.

Added to this, there was the fact of Rebecca Levitt having accompanied Lucilla to Sussex on the first occasion of her going there to be looked into. Who *was* Rebecca Levitt?

The name had conjured up a host of surmises in Leona's heart. She remembered the words of Anson in the letter to her father: "*I'm sorry to say he's heard about that business with the Levitt's girl.*"

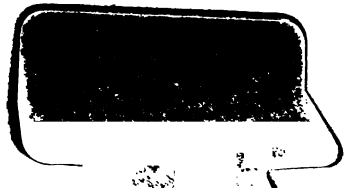
What business? What girl? Could she be identical with Rebecca Levitt, and if so, why did she cry over the parting with Abraham Anson's orphan? All this was fresh matter for speculation and inquiry, and Leona felt the energy, which had been rendered somewhat dormant by her prolonged stay with the Evans, stirring anew in her at the thought. She had always intended to make Liverpool her next stage of action. She wanted to be on the very spot where the murder was committed—amongst the very people who remembered its commission. But she had been puzzled to think under what character to go amongst them—on what plea to institute the inquiries which she trusted to follow up to her desired end.

Now her doubts were solved—her visit to Willowside had made all things easy to her.

She must enter Liverpool in a disguise which ran no chance of detection. *She would*

go there as Mrs. Gibson. She must have a plausible excuse for making acquaintances and asking questions.

Her ostensible object should be to find out Rebecca Levitt for news of Lucilla Anson.

END OF VOL. II.

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